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**THE EVOLUTION OF MARGINALISATION IN LIBERIA: FROM
YOUTH TO NEGLECTED VETERANS**

Emanuele Cerroni

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The University of Edinburgh

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Abstract

This study focused on presenting an analysis of the concept of marginalisation of former fighters after the Liberian civil conflict and how the web of connections such as status, identity and networks were central to any proposed establishment of a debate. The study had two aims. The first aim was to give a voice to the ex-soldiers who became neglected after the war, allowing them to tell their own stories of marginalisation before, during and after the conflict. The second aim was to help establish a debate on the notion of marginalisation that existed before the war and impacted the soldiers after the war. Within this, the study aimed to assess how the evolution of identity of individuals from youth to neglected veterans had occurred and to further the knowledge of the empirical literature in this regard. A secondary aim was to evaluate the success of reintegration of the ex-soldiers into Liberian society post-conflict and how far marginalisation hindered this attempt.

To achieve these aims, the study focused on the use of a qualitative research methodology as the central research component. As well as considering the view of the empirical literature, the researcher wished to provide an account of marginalisation from those that had experienced it first-hand. Therefore, the study dispensed with the use of quantitative surveys and instead carried out personal conversations face to face that would reveal the former fighters' feelings and attitudes in a more rounded and richer way. This methodological approach aimed to give a voice to the ex-soldiers and whether or not they perceive themselves as part of society. Using these interviews, the thesis aimed to analyse the influence of internal and external factors that caused the former fighters to perceive themselves as being either included, excluded or marginalised within Liberian society.

The interviews, combined with the results of the review of the empirical literature, enabled the researcher to draw a number of salient points regarding the concept of marginalisation. The study found that the creation of the feeling of marginalisation for former fighters was composed of a variety of psycho-social factors. These included detachment from family, marginalised primary identities, the development of war-connected networks and a resilient sense of belonging, all of which combined to create a distinct group identity of the neglected veteran that currently exists in Liberian society. This has been because the former fighters have been unable to

homogenise their status and identity with the rest of the population. This has stemmed from their perception of the failure of the reintegration process to eliminate the gap between former fighters and civilians and has led to serious problems within Liberian society.

The study concludes that Liberian youth developed a war-family identity (collective group identity) and gained a strong sense of belonging. The actions of DDR led to this disintegration of the war family and triggered a series of reactions psychologically and socially. Moreover, reintegration attempts have proved unsuccessful due to the lack of education and skills held by the former fighters. Attempts to be accepted into society has not led to real integration. This has increased the perception of former fighters that they are now neglected veterans. Recommendations for further study are also provided in this work.

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Chapter 1: The case for a new perspective on former fighters in Liberia

1.1 Introduction

This study aims to present an analysis of the evolution of marginalisation in Liberia, assessing the perceived concept of the stated marginalisation from the personal views of former soldiers of the Liberian civil conflict. The study had two aims. The first aim was to give a voice to the ex-soldiers who became neglected after the war, allowing them to tell their own stories of marginalisation before, during and after the conflict. The second aim was to help establish a debate on the notion of marginalisation that existed before the war and impacted the soldiers after the war. This work combines a qualitative primary research methodology (using personal stories from interviewed ex-soldiers) as well as a comprehensive synthesis of the existing empirical literature on the subject. The analysis focuses on how former fighters view the attempts at their integration made by Liberian society and the factors that has hindered this integration. In this manner, the study concentrates on psycho-social factors that have led to the creation of the feeling of marginalisation felt by these ex-soldiers as they have transformed from young individuals to fighters in the civil conflict and then as they have developed into ex-soldiers in the post-conflict era in Liberia.

1.1.1 First impressions: general considerations of post-conflict changes and related research problems

Some of my own brothers who never fought the war can most of the times call me killer and so many times I do not follow them when they are going out especially so during the last independence day, my own cousin told me not to follow them to the beach because people were going to take all of them former fighter once people who see me fighting the war is with them. So, I feel so bad. (Dan 2009, pers. comm., 16 May)

Dan is a young ex-combatant experiencing some problems with his peers and he is not the only one. The relationship between former fighters and the rest of the population has been changing since the end of the war. When I first arrived in Liberia

in 2004, only few months after the establishment of the peacekeeping mission, the country was experiencing a period of adjustment and enormous change. There was an atmosphere of transformation, driven by the determination of Liberian institutions and former factions to change direction from the previous situation. From the beginning there was a clear will to leave the path that had led the country to conflict and instability. Furthermore the significant presence of the international community demonstrated a new and major involvement of regional and extra-regional actors in the country's stabilisation. However my impression was that this considerable determination at institutional level was in contrast with the perplexity and confusion among individual Liberians. Approaching this situation from an academic perspective I realised that some of my earliest impressions could provide the basis for a number of questions. The background that generated these questions was general and related only in part to previous studies and literature, but pointed me in the right direction on what the field of my research could be.

First, I noticed that the end of the war acted as a “big bang” that gave birth to new relationships between citizens. Those categorised as former fighters were demobilised and placed in a pacified Liberia. The new interaction between ex-combatants and civilians represented virgin territory, not previously studied in Liberia, or only after previous conflicts (see Utas 2003). This reflection helped to identify a first research problem: How did the relationship between Liberians change after the conflict? In order to address this problem an appropriate analysis must be made of the sudden change of circumstances brought about by the end of the war that left many citizens in chaos, especially those who played an active part in the conflict. It appeared that former fighters were trying to fit into the new social system brought about by the pacification, finding their way back into a reconciled society. Many of them had been through the disarmament and demobilisation process, giving up their previous standard of living and trying to find a new purpose for their lives. At first glance it seemed that the end of the war brought short-term chaos into their lives, especially as many of them were used to a hierarchical military order that kept them safe from the uncertainty of day-to-day decisions. In most cases the factions provided the means to access food, shelter and work during the war. For the soldiers this state of affairs was suddenly dissolved, in a kind of “big bang”, when the fighting ceased.

The end of certain conflicts can sometimes be as traumatic as the beginning,

breaking the status quo that had been created. Part of this status quo is also represented by relationships among and around the fighters. In Liberia, after demobilisation the system of relationships of the ex-combatants was essentially “blown up”, leaving space to create new ones. I realised that these phenomena needed further analysis. The interaction of the ex-combatants with the external environment and the interface with the communities represents the central part of the reintegration process. Consequently a further development of the research problem is: How did the relationship between civilians and ex-combatants influence the success or failure of the reintegration process?

As a follow-on from the transformation of the relationships I noticed another phenomenon that stimulated my interest. Some population groups were experiencing difficult relationships within themselves. As I decided that ex-combatants should be the focus of my research, attention was focused on the troubled connections of former fighters with civilians and among them. Many former fighters used the opportunity given by the end of the conflict to go back to their communities and families. Others for various reasons tried to find new places to stay and begin their attempt to fight their way back into civilian life. I noticed that in some cases this effort had been not successful, leading to exclusion from society. This segregation was already producing effects of marginalisation on the individuals. The marginalisation of the former fighters in this case represents the other side of the coin of reintegration. Even if very intuitive and devoid of theoretical background, these original hypotheses also stimulated the initial ideas for the research. The following paragraphs will add to these first intuitions the required historical background and theoretical framework to facilitate the formation of more structured theoretical questions. In order to address this problem a further analysis on the reintegration or the marginalisation processes and their interaction is tackled in the next paragraphs.

1.1.2 Being ex-combatants in Liberia

I am originally from Butuo but moved to Monrovia. Since 1990 I stopped going to school. Sometimes I feel bad ‘cause I don’t have an education. I don’t know how to read and write. To not be stigmatised as an ex-comb [ex-combatant] I keep myself busy with my job, and I encourage some of my friends. We graduated together from the vocational school, sold our tools and bought goods to sell in a wheelbarrow. I called them so we can work to fit in

the rebuilding process. The others are cooperating and trying to work in schools within the communities in their area of occupations, changing behaviour and working towards progress. I don't fear the community recognising me as an ex-comb because some of them already know. Now they see me as good man, Christian. We Liberians are quick to forgive one another so everything is fine.

It is very difficult to earn a living here in the city. Everything is expensive and to get money is hard. Everything you do in the city is only money that can get you anything here. There is no scholarship to go to school so I would love to go back to my village to make farm. Everybody is happy and will go to receive me in Senekola Kamply Bang [probably his village but it was not possible to locate it]. The last time I went to my village was 2006. We and Ivory Coast share common border. A lot of ex-combs are there doing business. The problem between ex-comb and civilian is cool but it depends on the community you find yourself in. Some communities reject some ex-combs based on their attitudes. With the civilians, if you change, the community will accept you but if you don't change the community will reject you. (Sheriff 2006, pers. comm., 23 July)

Sheriff is a 36-year-old Liberian man who, after the end of the conflict in 2003, took part in the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programme to enhance his skills so he could finally participate in community life and seek an opportunity for positive engagement. Like some of his former comrades he quickly recognised the limitations on them for constructive political, social and economic involvement. His position was not so different from that of his youth before the war. In fact, according to some authors studying West Africa, the exclusion of particular categories from the social, economic and political life was also very common before the war (Richards 1995; Utas 2004; Vigh 2006). "Pre-war Liberia was a country in which exclusion and marginalisation were normal conditions for the majority of the inhabitants" (Jennings 2008: 22). "Marginalisation is understood in this context to mean the mechanisms that cause an individual to become outside the mainstream of productive activity and/or social reproductive activity" (Leonard 1984: 180). Sheriff did not have the chance to have a proper education during his adolescence and tried when he was an adult but stopped because of the outbreak of hostilities. Telling his story revealed that the alienation from the decision-making process of his community pushed him to take part in the Liberian war, fighting for

more than one warring faction. “I had no other choices; there was no future for me” (Sheriff 2006, pers. comm., 23 July). Hence he joined the NPFL (National Patriotic Front of Liberia) in 1991, and in 1994 he fought for ULIMO (United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy). For him and others, exclusion from the active life of the communities did not end with the conflict. Some of the surveys on former fighters’ reintegration in Liberia (Jennings 2008; Pugel 2007; Hill, Taylor and Temin 2008; Bøås and Hatløy 2008) show that there are a number of stories of ex-combatants like Sheriff’s revealing low acceptance by the communities. I decided to see how the marginalisation experienced by people like Sheriff before the war evolved after the war.

In Sheriff’s words above, exclusion from society is due to the attitude of some of the former fighters, who share the experience of being rejected by their own peers. Other writers (Jennings 2008; Bedert 2007) believe this exclusion has its roots in discrimination based simply on being ex-combatants. In fact, the conflict produced many changes in Liberia affecting the whole population, or part of it; and it is fair to assume that the process of marginalisation was no exception in terms of its extent and the individuals affected. In some cases marginalisation implies discrimination, for instance when the exclusion is based on prejudice. In post-conflict Liberia too, some inhabitants could be the victims of prejudice, especially those who took an active part in the conflict. To support this supposition there is an extensive literature engaging the phenomena of marginalisation as cause and effect of war in West Africa (Richards 2005; Utas 2003; Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot 2003; Munive 2010b). In a post-conflict case, marginalisation can be considered as consequence or cause of a failed reintegration process. Liberia serves as an interesting case study for the reintegration of former fighters due to its large number of former soldiers, estimated at about 103,000 (UNMIL Today 2009), and the deep involvement of the international community after the end of the war, in terms of providing human and financial resources.

The reintegration of former fighters has been widely investigated in economic and sociological terms, focusing mainly on technical issues such as vocational training, education and employment opportunities. For this study, I decided to approach the reintegration of former fighters through the identification process of the ex-combatants themselves, considering how this identification engenders inclusion or

exclusion in society. Being identified by others as a member of the category of ex-combatants or deliberately choosing to be included in that group creates divisions in society. During the fieldwork I noticed that the communities are not always ready to reinsert the former fighters within their social and economic fabric, leading them to feel rejected. As a reaction to this sensation, ex-combatants in some cases tend to keep their distance from the rest of the population, gathering with those who they find more similar. The research on the identification process is part of the fieldwork conducted in Liberia between 2004 and 2009, and is described by this thesis through the help of Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory (SIT). As part of social psychology, SIT facilitates the explanation of some of the behaviour of the Liberian population in both categories: civilians and former fighters. Using the mechanism of in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination proposed by SIT represents the perfect link between identity and marginalisation, where the stronger the identification with a group the greater the tendency to marginalise the others (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

In explaining the correlation between marginalisation and identity, this thesis analyses some factors that transformed the soldiers' web of connections at the end of the war. The concept of "web of connections" here refers to three specific elements that together make it easier to locate the socio-economic position of former fighters in society: status, networks and identity. "Status" represents the social position of the individual in relation with others; "networks" embody the circles of people with whom the individual interacts; and "identity" serves to measure the intensity of the ties of the individual with his groups. Analysing the three elements together facilitates the production of a framework of the relationships of the individual with the social environment. The relationships between the individual and his environment change constantly as a result of the changing circumstances. The end of the conflict in general has produced changes in all aspects of soldiers' lives, and consequently on these three factors.

It is clear that, between 1989 and 2003, those who took part in the fighting abandoned their previous identity as civilians and then, with the end of conflict, became civilians again, but with a new identity. "Before the war I was a farmer with my family, a simple life for a simple job, but with the war everything changed" (Balah 2005, pers. comm., 23 October). Thus in order to describe the marginalisation process

the aim of this research is to track developments in the soldiers' lives triggered by DDR and, in particular, changes in their identity after the end of the conflict. The focus of the study is ex-combatants, rather than the wider population. However, in the light of experience in other countries, it is not feasible to draw a precise boundary between the categories of former fighters and civilians. In most civil conflicts, the internal political situation of the warring factions is confused and creates many ambiguities. At least 11 factions fought inside Liberian territory during the 14 years of war (Aboagye 2002). Some of these factions had common roots and proliferated after internal divisions and splits, while others materialised for specific periods of time and disappeared shortly afterwards (Aboagye 2002). The volatility of these groups reflected the fact that their members were soldiers at a certain point of the conflict and, at another, civilians. This confusion made differentiation difficult after the war. For this reason, this thesis does not focus on the actions perpetrated by the individual in the past, because this is often confused and uncertain; but rather on the way he perceives himself, and how he is perceived by others – in a word, his identity. This research encompasses individuals who recognised themselves as former fighters, accepting that identity is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are (Jenkins 1996: 5).

This criterion of self-identification has been also useful in evaluating how former fighters sense their reintegration into society or, rather, to what extent they perceive themselves to be included or excluded by the communities. Apparently convenient self-identification with what is really a problematic group is a symptom of the sense of exclusion felt by the individual (Tajfel 1970). This feeling of exclusion plays a central role in the study of the marginalisation process. Marginalisation is in fact the relegation of an individual or a group to the edge of society (Kagan and Burton 2010) – in other words exclusion from active participation in the community. The study of self-identification allows the thesis to analyse the marginalisation process through the eyes and words of the ex-combatants themselves. This thesis illustrates the concept by using the conversations, interviews and personal comments of the informants themselves. In many cases their words are more immediate than their interpretation.

For instance, Samy, an ex-combatant I met in Monrovia, had a remarkable story to tell. The use of his interview is a perfect example to summarise some of the

concepts expressed above. During the interview he reported that he was forced by the governmental forces to fight against LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy) during the siege of Monrovia in 2003. As he says:

The fighters came in their cars and catch us so we could go and help fight in the front line. I fought for the ex-GOL because they took advantage but when I had the opportunity I left and I crossed the bridge and I joined the LURD forces on the other side. (Samy 2005, pers. comm., 16 November)

Samy was abducted and forced to fight. At this stage of his life he was a victim. He changed sides and joined the LURD forces as they promised to take better care of him if he stayed at his own will. From then on he considered himself a soldier. In cases such as this, it is not feasible to separate victims and perpetrators. After the war Samy took part in the disarmament and demobilisation process, when he was given the ex-combatant ID card that confirmed the end of his status of fighter in order to acquire the status of civilian. This was the first change in his web of connections.

In 2004, when UNMIL troops came and disarm us I voluntary went at the camp of disarmament. I did this for the sum of one hundred and fifty dollars. In exchange they gave me an ex-combatant ID because I got registered in the programme handing over my SMG-AK (Samy 2005, pers. comm., 16 November)

Samy speaks about his former comrades and their integration in the community, expressing some concerns.

Some of my friends are not well in the community but some are well, when you go in the community and ask for soldiers they will say they are alright. I feel all humans don't have the same heart, some will hate you while others will like you. We have no problem also if now we [former comrades] still live together in the community. (Samy 2005, pers. comm., 16 November)

These words confirm the existence of some degree of exclusion from the community. The spontaneous reaction of some former fighters to such exclusion is to create their own functional links, their own society and their own networks. In a few words Samy described to us his situation and the conditions of the group of former fighters. However, even if the first person narrative is very valuable, interpretative methods are also widely used in this work. Due to my background in political science and my studies in peacekeeping operations, the approach to these issues is not purely sociological, but often has a conflict management theory background.

The following paragraphs introduce my work in the field of literature, outlining the literary review, the historical background to the peace process and the methodology used. They outline the conditions of and backdrop to my work. Subsequent chapters expand these concepts through analysis of the data collected in the field, and describe outcomes and conclusions.

1.2 Marginalisation, discrimination and conflict in Liberian history

One of the reasons for analysing the historical situation in Liberia is that the country played a major role in generating regional instability in West Africa and that, by identifying this country's dynamics, it is possible to understand some far-reaching events that affected the whole region. In approaching the Liberian context as a regional problem, the international context must be considered as a primary source of background before proceeding to the next step of national perspective. To do that, we have to consider geographical position and the complex web that linked some of the countries during the last 20 years. The history of West Africa involves a consideration of politics and its impact within the broader themes of religious and ethnic hostility, and sometimes even the breakdown of relations among family or friends leading to personal enmity and a desire for revenge.

1.2.1 Inequality lays the foundations for conflict

For 133 years after its creation, Liberia enjoyed stability and peace, albeit on a highly unjust basis. The country has since its establishment had highly discriminatory characteristics, and elements in its society typical of a marginalisation process. The “founding fathers” were former slaves from the US, shipped to Africa in 1822 by the American Colonization Society (ACS) (Boley 1983). This organisation was established in 1817 to solve the problem of Negroes in the US, as they were considered incompatible with the Anglo-Saxon culture (Boyd 1962). Sending them back to their “homeland” was essentially seen as a workable solution to the problem of a group suffering discrimination in America. After the first group reached West Africa, many of those descended from Africans decided to migrate to Liberia and establish some settlements on the coast (Blyden 2004). Between 1822 and 1841 the settlements were under the direct control of a white American governor appointed by the ACS. In 1841 a settler, Joseph J. Roberts, was chosen as governor and he led the

country to the constitution of 1847 that established Liberia as an independent nation (Akpan1973). Due to fundamental discrimination in the constitution, a hierarchical social structure was set up limiting political and economic participation only to “Americo-Liberians” – descendants of freed slaves – until 1980 (Dennis 2006). The approximately sixteen tribes of native Liberians were not entitled to any citizenship, privileges or rights, and were discriminated against also in matters such as public employment and franchise (Akpan1973). According to Dunn-Marcos et al. (2005) the biggest heritage the Americo-Liberians brought with them from the US was social stratification based on skin colour. The mulattos, light-complexioned people with mixed-race lineage, were at the top followed by other Americo-Liberians with darker skin. Below them there were the “Congos”, slaves freed from slavers’ ships, and at the bottom the African Liberians of the indigenous population (Dunn-Marcos et al. 2005). While in the first years the struggle for economical influence between Congos and Americo-Liberians was quite evident, at the end of the 1800s the two groups shared the same status, to the point that the two terms (“Congo” and “Americo-Liberian”) became interchangeable (Dennis 2006). What did not change, according to the above-cited literature, was the economic and political suppression of the indigenous population. On this point some authors (Burrowes 1989; Moran 1995; Dunn and Tarr 1988) controversially assert that there is no evidence of alienation between the ethnic groups besides the fanatical interest of the Americo-Liberians in endogamy. The only certainty is that the political situation of low representation on the basis of discrimination did not change until 1947, when an illuminated President Tubman started a new “Unification policy”. Following his installation in 1944 Tubman extended the vote first to women and then to indigenous Liberians. The changes to the inequitable political system boosted also the sense of pride of the indigenous population, reducing the psychological subjection of the Afro-Liberian (Dunn-Marcos et al. 2005). Tubman’s government lasted for 27 years and after his death in 1971 the administration passed to his Vice-president, William R. Tolbert. The new regime was even more open to the indigenous population, promoting ethnically inclusive policies (Nass 2000). But if a new wave of hope arose, the gap between the two groups was far from being filled and the discontent of the population following the proposal to increase the price of rice led to the violent events of the 1980s (Dolo 1996). The general self-segregation of the Americo-Liberian population was an indicator of their superior attitude towards the “heathens and savages” (Nass 2000: 9). The former

slaves brought from the US the racist notion of African ethnicity as inferior, taking full advantage of the indigenous population – a practice fully supported by ad hoc elaborated constitutional rights. The consequences of these constitutional policies “led to frustration, anger and animosity towards the settlers, thus laying the foundations for a future civil war” (Ballah and Abrokwa 2003: 57).

1.2.2 The Liberian civil war: from ethnic disparities to indiscriminate violence

This section focuses on providing a brief analysis of how the situation in Liberia deteriorated from a collection of ethnic disparities to the outburst of indiscriminate violence and the outbreak of the Civil War in the country. This analysis is important not only to gauge how soldiers were suddenly thrown into the Civil War scenario but also because it allows a more detailed and comprehensive background of the study to take place. This section presents a focused discussion of the events that turned the country from one experiencing ethnic disparities to one where indiscriminate violence occurred. The situation in Liberia prior to the outbreak of the Civil War highlighted that there was a growing disparity between those in power and the majority of the rest of the population. A study by Clapham (1976) indicates that the decision-making at the centralized level in Liberia was restricted to only 0.6% of the overall population, reflecting this viewpoint, and was the part of the population supported by the American government. The growing resentment and disconnection between those in power and the ordinary population, combined with the fact that the army had been deinstitutionalized during the administration of Tolbert, meant that this led to a number of skirmishes and incidents of violence in the country.

This growing disconnection between the population and ruling elite led to a succession of attacks and mass detentions and massacres (Fayemi 2004). During this time, the rise of Samuel Doe was being witnessed as he rose through the ranks from humble beginnings as a poorly-educated army sergeant from the Krahn tribe. It was he who gained control of the People’s Redemption Council (PRC), assuming the full executive powers of the position following the coup d’etat against the ruling Tolbert in 1980 (Dolo, 1996). The strengthening of the PRC was down to the fact that the members of the group were all local and indigenous Liberian soldiers and were from the Krahn ethnic group, just like that of Doe. Because of this, it is believed that the

that the predominant ethnic composition was a major reason for the development of the Civil War (Ballah and Abrokwa 2003).

Under Doe, it is clear that the situation in Liberia deteriorated quickly. It has been highlighted that the Doe regime was one that was extraordinarily brutal. The tactics employed by Doe not only disenfranchised many Liberians, but also effectively erased the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate political action (Nass 2000). This saw the deterioration of society from one that was fragile and in the balance to one where Civil War was increasingly more likely and outbreaks of violence were more common. The tactics used by Doe ensured that by 1984, his group had lost a lot of the general support it had garnered previously. Doe lost support while the common feeling was that the government system was unchanged and basically one of the same body but just a different leader (Gifford, 1993: 18).

The political situation in Liberia was being restricted by the ruling party. It is noted that with the use of force by the AFL, the existence of rival political parties remained banned until 1984 (Nnoli, 1998). In this manner, the country experienced its first elections held the year after this. In 1985, the elections were held and Doe's National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL) was presented as the overall winner. However, the nature of these elections and how they were completed were also a reason for dissatisfaction and division. The literature notes that during the election and the period shortly after, they were characterized by a great level of fraud and the belief that votes were bought or that the system was rigged (Nass, 2000). At any rate, once the elections had taken place, there were also examples of widespread human rights abuses, the growth of ethnic tensions and high levels of corrupt that occurred at the highest levels of government (Nass, 2000). The regime of Doe failed to address these issues and actually increased tensions with the view that he was too busy taking the government into his own hands, concentrating power and taking resources to strengthen his own party (Adebajo, 2002). The acceptance of this as fact had already led Doe's support to weaken, with fellow comrades from different ethnicities distancing themselves from the regime of Doe. This led to an ethnic purge of the original PRC, with the 16 founding members of the PRC killed or exiled by Doe (Alao, 1998). Here it is apparent that the system of government under Doe in Liberia

was failing and that the government was resorting to more and more desperate tactics to help retain power. This acknowledges that the situation in Liberia had been steadily moving from one of discontent to one of outright condemnation of the regime and the respective retaliation of the Doe regime, responding to this criticism by using violence to control the population.

A remarkable example was Thomas Quiwonkpa from the Gio and Mano ethnic groups. He led a failed coup plot against President Doe in 1985 that led to his murder. After this Doe's government increasingly adopted an ethnic-based outlook (Richards 1996). The rivalry between Quiwonkpa and Doe led to ethnic hostility in Liberia, with people from the Gio and Mano groups beaten, murdered and treated as enemies (Harden 1993). Until then the government did not explicitly practise violence against any ethnic group, but ensured a disproportionate representation of the Krahn in decision-making. The overthrow of the regime in 1980 had effectively substituted one hegemonic ethnic group for another (Conteh-Morgan and Kadivar 1995). In any case, on 6 January 1986 Liberia officially returned to the pretence of civilian rule with the inauguration of Samuel Doe as president (Gifford 1993).

The marginalisation process during Doe's administration in fact found expression in ethnic decriminalisation. A very effective instrument of Krahn's ethnic power was the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). The new national army under Doe was highly ethnicised through a recruitment policy that favoured the Krahn. The AFL, with an estimated 9,000 troops (Dolo 1996), remained loyal to Doe until his death. With the purge of the Americo-Liberians, members of Doe's Krahn ethnic group soon dominated political and military life. This heightened ethnic tension, leading to frequent hostilities between the politically and militarily dominant Krahn and other ethnic groups. The almost unilateral violent ethnic polarisation eventually took a break with the attempt in 1989 by other ethnic groups – led by Charles Ghankay Taylor, himself of Americo-Liberian extraction – to take power.

Hostilities started on 24 December 1989, when 100 fighters under the colours of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), headed by Taylor, crossed the frontier from Côte d'Ivoire and attacked Doe's Liberian army (Aboagye 2002). While the events of 1980 represented only a power overthrow followed by a short period of conflict, the fighting after 1989 characterised a proper civil war lasting more than a decade. The first Liberian civil war lasted for seven years, from 1989 until 1996; after

the presidential elections of 1997, the second civil war erupted in 1999 and lasted for four years, until 2003 (Kieh 2009). The conflict opened the scene to new contenders and factions in the struggle for power in Liberia. Among the most important was Taylor and his NPFL, accepted to be the real mastermind behind events in recent Liberian history up to the end of the war in 2003. There are differing opinions about the origins of the NPFL but these can be simplified into two theories – first, that it was established by Quiwonkpa in 1985 (as argued by Ellis (1999)) and, second, that it was set up by Taylor in 1988 (Aning 1997).

The NPFL totalled around 25,000 troops during the first civil war, with most of the fighters coming from the ethnic groups of northern Liberia (Nimba county) who were persecuted by the Krahn under the Doe regime, especially the Gio and Mano (Outram 1997). The NPFL's leader, Taylor, was a former Doe loyalist and the director of the General Services Agency until goods worth almost US\$1 million were bought by his department and never delivered to the government (Ellis 1999). He was arrested in the US and charged, but while awaiting extradition he escaped from prison and reached Ghana, joining the opposition to Doe's regime. He claimed in a private interview with Herman J. Cohen that he had been allowed to walk free from prison by his Massachusetts jailers (Adebajo 2002). Taylor capitalised on the current ethnic tension, hiding his personal motives behind the search for justice while manipulating ethnic differences – on one side the Mandingo and Krahn of the government troops loyal to Doe and on the other the Mano and Gio of the NPFL under Taylor. The NPFL was targeting the rival ethnicities during its march down from Nimba County to the capital, while government troops were decimating Monrovia-based opponents (Conteh-Morgan and Kadivar 1995). By mid-1990, Samuel Doe and his troops were barricaded in the Executive Mansion in the capital city. Taylor and his companions controlled much of the country while Prince Johnson, an NPFL fighter who split to form his own guerrilla force, took most of Monrovia with his new faction, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL).

Since it was feared that the instability of the country could provoke an outbreak of violence in the wider region, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sent a contingent of soldiers, the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), to try to control the violence; but they were poorly prepared. On 9 September 1990, as President Doe was visiting the newly-established ECOMOG

headquarters in the Free Port of Monrovia, Johnson's forces invaded the building and captured him. They tortured and killed him shortly thereafter. However, the removal of Doe did not stabilise the situation since both Taylor and Johnson claimed power. In the efforts to find a stable solution for the government of the country, ECOMOG declared an Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU), with Amos Sawyer as temporary President, but this was not accepted by Taylor and he attacked Monrovia with his troops (Dolo 1996). At this stage there were three factions involved in an internecine war, eventually becoming four as a result of another split among Doe's remaining supporters, known as the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy, or ULIMO. This latter faction, created in 1991, was led by Raleigh Seekie and operated against the insurgency of the Revolutionary United Forces (RUF) in Sierra Leone and western Liberia, supporting the Sierra Leone government. In 1994 internal pressures caused the faction eventually to split in two: ULIMO-J, a Krahn faction led by General Roosevelt Johnson, and ULIMO-K, more Muslim/Mandingo-based, under Alhaji Kromah. ULIMO-J totalled around 8,000 combatants and ULIMO-K around 12,000 (Outram 1997).

In the light of the complicated situation the UN decided to step in. The Security Council adopted Resolution 788 (1992) which imposed "a general and complete embargo on the delivery of weapons and military equipment to Liberia" (SC 1992), supporting ECOWAS in its efforts to end the civil war. Taylor was forced to negotiate a treaty between the NPFL, IGNU and a not-yet-separated ULIMO. The ceasefire could not be implemented and in the following months a number of supplementary agreements, amending and clarifying the previous arrangements, were negotiated without achieving either peace or stability.

The UN tried to speed up the peace process, establishing the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) on 22 September 1993. However, fighting continued until the end of August 1995 when the Abuja Accord restored the ceasefire. Even if the alternation between peace and war did not cease, the humanitarian situation seemed to improve in several parts of Liberia. The UN Secretary-General reported to the Security Council on 13 September 1995: "While at least 10 peace agreements have been signed and broken since 1989, the prospects for peace in Liberia are perhaps better now than they have been at any time since the outbreak of the civil war" (SC 1995: 8). Despite this, the crisis continued: in October 1995,

approximately 1.5 million people were receiving humanitarian assistance; an estimated population of between half a million and one million were internally displaced, while over 800,000 Liberian refugees had settled in neighbouring countries (URW 1995: no page).

The Abuja Accord brought a short break to an internal conflict that had seen the involvement of half a dozen factions (Outram 1997). The first civil war ended as the sides agreed on disarmament and demobilisation by 1997, and elections took place in July that year. These “free and fair” presidential elections saw the victory of Charles Taylor and his NPFL. However, most people had voted for him out of fear and because many thought that electing him was the only way to improve living conditions (Harris 1999). Taylor instead turned Liberia into a centre of gun smuggling and “blood diamonds”, allegedly being involved in a multimillion dollar business that helped to spread war and chaos throughout the region and included support of guerrillas in neighbouring countries.

On 30 September 1997, after the withdrawal of its UNOMIL military personnel, the United Nations progressed to the next step of conflict management, establishing a United Nations Peace-building Support Office in Liberia (UNOL). However, the situation in the country remained unstable, with constant attacks by several rebel groups. The elections in 1997 did not lead to recovery or the resumption of growth and development. The failure of peace-building efforts after the first civil war made further conflict almost inevitable (Yangbeh Jr. 2006). The second civil war began on 21 April 1999 with armed attacks launched by a warlordist militia, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). Its members included former soldiers of some of the militias that fought in the first civil war and disaffected members of the NPFL (Pham 2004).

LURD launched its attacks from Guinea, north of Liberia. The second civil war appeared to be a confrontation of three warring factions, mostly as result of the merger or restructuring of the previous factions. The Government of Liberia Forces (GOL) under the command of Taylor were mainly the successor to the NPFL. The two opponents were LURD, led by Sekou Conneh, and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), led by Thomas Nimely. (Created in March 2003, MODEL joined the fight against Taylor’s regime, launching its attack from Côte d’Ivoire, east of Liberia (Kieh Jr. 2009)). The conflict led to the exodus to neighbouring countries of

around 350,000 refugees and the internal displacement of around 530,000 Liberians (UNHCR 2003: 222).

Charles Taylor resigned as President on 11 August 2003 and was flown into exile in Nigeria. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), signed in Accra on 18 August by Liberia's three fighting forces (the GOL, LURD and MODEL), promised to bring sustainable peace and security to Liberia. This agreement did, indeed, bring an end to the brutal civil war in Liberia. It led to a request to the UN to deploy a peacekeeping force to Liberia to support the National Transitional Government and to assist in the implementation of the CPA. UNMIL (United Nations Mission in Liberia) was established by Security Council Resolution 1509 of 19 September 2003 (SC 2003). Its mandate included the development and implementation of the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration and Repatriation programme (DDRR) (Aning, Birikorang and Jaye 2010: 19). The peculiarity of the Liberian case added the extra "R" to the usual mechanism of UN missions. Under the terms of the CPA, the additional "R" stood for the physical and psychological "Rehabilitation" of former fighters.

1.2.3 From fighters to civilians through the DDR programme

Having already introduced the DDR program, it is important to assess its impact on the reintegration of individuals into Liberian society following the end of the conflict. As stated, the DDR programme was viewed an essential part of eventual reintegration. Firstly, the DD phase helped to disconnect the fighters from their chain of command; Secondly, the R phase was the actual reintegration of the ex-combatants into communities. "For instance, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes often fail to address the appropriate needs of young women and in a variety of ways 'prevent' them from participating" (Coulter, Persson and Utas 2008: 5). This was the case of the first DDR in Liberia in 1997, which failed to prevent a further outbreak of conflict. Many authors have formulated theories on how to improve the methods of the DDR based on the Liberian experience.

Jennings (2008: 37) makes three major recommendations for developing a DDR programme:

- Make it minimalist or maximalist from the start
- Communicate and manage expectations

- Be flexible about DDR structure; this may include delinking the DD from the R.

According to Jennings (2008), in order to fully implement DDR programmes, it is necessary to understand their function, how each part of the process works in relation to the other parts, and the direct consequences this has for peacekeeping and those affected by it.

However, it is not always clear what is expected from the policymakers in order to reintegrate the combatants, nor what needs to be considered, such as the duration, the timing, the consistency, and the long- and short-term consequences the process has on those involved. Jennings refers to the “maximalist and minimalist response to reintegration” (Jennings 2008: 6) and suggests that the response should vary according to the circumstances, but be constant in each mission. Since the concept of reintegration is so general and includes many processes, such as demilitarisation, employment, acceptance by society and education, it can, she argues, be “interpreted and operationalized either broadly or narrowly” (Jennings 2008: 6).

The full process can be seen from different points of view but what is important is to ensure that everyone involved shares the same expectations. Whichever approach is taken, there must be a clear and concise plan from the beginning of the process based on what resources and benefits are available; otherwise, there is the risk of confusion, frustration and impatience as well as of outbreaks of dissatisfaction and even of violence – such as, for example, the riots that broke out in December 2003 outside Monrovia after inadequate communication about the benefits that would be received from the DDR programme.

From the point of view of my work, this concept expressed by Jennings is fundamental when it comes to understanding the failure of the international community to fulfil the expectations of ex-combatants. The frustration and impatience created by false expectations led to dissatisfaction. This discontent has sometimes been caused by the DDR process, which can inhibit the former fighters’ reintegration as it can highlight the “separateness” between the non-combatant and the fighter. This disparity between the two groups and the consequent problematic relationships is the central element of my research – which involves the creation of different networks exclusively for ex-combatants. The detachment from community is a major issue in the regrouping of soldiers dismissed from their armies. The loss of the bonds they had

before joining up, and the loss of their status as soldiers, pushes them to associate with others who have the same needs, which leads to the birth of a new social group. We will analyse these factors in depth in the next chapter.

In the meantime it is important to note how the mechanism of dividing fighters and civilians was highly criticised by several authors (see Coulter, Persson and Utas 2008; Jennings 2008; Munive 2010). The possession of a weapon was the only way to prove enrolment in the factions. Specht (2006), analysing female demobilisation, highlighted how difficult it was for the female fighters to hand in weapons compared with the male soldiers. The situation was made worse by the fact that many commanders excluded from the list combatants from their own units, preventing them from receiving payment (Solheim 2003). According to Coulter, Persson and Utas (2008), while the method was successful in several parts of the world, in Liberia it was less effective due to the complexity of determining the distinction between non-combatants and fighters. In some cases the combatants would deliberately decide to not participate in the DDR. One of the reasons was “that they did not trust the process to help them, or that they were afraid of repercussions and social stigma if they were identified as ex-fighters” (Coulter, Persson and Utas 2008: 24). The unclear division between the categories was among the reasons for many difficulties during the implementation of the reintegration process. However, even if many fighters avoided the DDR, the economic reward for handing in weapons and the promised allowances attracted a higher than expected number of former fighters to enrol. This, according to Jennings (2008), accentuated the problems created by the lack of planning since resources were not used efficiently. The consequence was of a “dangerous disconnection” (Jennings 2008: 23) between disarmament and reintegration. The system was exploited and abused by the commanders, which in turn made it more difficult to plan and implement a fully functioning and cohesive system of reintegration. This makes it difficult to assess and improve the effectiveness of the programme.

To develop such effectiveness, Jennings recommends that the structure of the DDR be flexible in order to separate, or “delink”, the DD from the R phase, with the scope to maximise the outcome; she suggests ways in which this would achieve greater results for those involved. This necessity arises from the fact that the R phase is often seen as the soft, development part of DDR programmes and as part of a

“security first” package for a short-term solution, instead of as an instrument for long-term recovery (Muggah 2004). Jennings highlights how the funding the DDR receives affects the sequencing of the DDR process. The expenses for the DD are covered in a consolidated budget coming from the peacekeeping mission, while funding for the reintegration part relies on the voluntary contributions of donors. This form of accountancy shows the priority given to the rehabilitation process of the former fighters.

The nature of the two different components, DD and R, explains why there are differences in treatment of the various elements constituting the DDR process. While the DD aspect reflects the immediate need to respond to problems of security and stability, the R component is a response to the need for a more long-term socio-economic process. Jennings (2008: 13) notes that the security-driven nature of the reintegration process has changed over the years, and writes about the relationship between security and development. It is necessary to distinguish reintegration as a development tool and as a security tool, as the two forms do not always complement one another. A response to this situation was the decision in 2005, after the UN SG report, to insert into the funding of the DDR the Reinsertion component, based on the same precepts as those found in the overall DDR vision, in terms of a strategy for addressing security issues, to be solved immediately. The idea is that a post-war state of emergency needs a “painkiller” solution for buying time so that a more adequate strategy can be elaborated. Following this line of thought, reinsertion is a form of intermediate assistance designed to help the beneficiaries, in this case former fighters and their families, in their basic needs such as small tools, food, clothes, general allowances and so on.

This practice of delinking the two processes, according to Jennings, also recognises the needs of both the non-combatants and the former fighters alike, and can be used as a tool to control stigmatisation and discrimination between groups in the community and in society as a whole.

Jennings (2008) suggests considering each of the DDR participants separately and that a form of distribution of different benefits, related to the group they belong to in terms of gender, education, rank, ethnicity, etc, should be developed. This suggestion arises from the assumption that there is almost no difference between former fighters and non-combatants in terms of social or economic development. The

eventual differentiation of treatment in the DDR programmes can create resentment in society towards the former fighters.

The mechanism established by the peacekeeping operation was designed to include all the warring factions in the programmes of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration, but did not fully consider the future implications of creating two opposite groups: former fighters and civilians. The roots of this partition can be found, of course, before and during the fighting, but with a thin line of separation, since practitioners have found it difficult to categorise neatly those involved in and those affected by the conflict. There has never been a pure and clear border between victims and perpetrators, since most of the victims became perpetrators themselves. As Ellis (1999) observes,

There appears to have been a large number of people who took up arms at some stage of the war, but who may have been victims at other times ... Even hard-core fighters seem to have remained attached to wider social communities. (Ellis 1999: 133)

Some identity tools explained in the following paragraphs will enable this thesis to deal with this problem of categorisation. It is the belief of the researcher that the situation in Liberia changed fundamentally with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2003 and the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in the same year (UNSC 2003). All the peacekeeping mechanisms put in place by the UN operation were meant to lead the country from conflict to stability. One step in providing a secure and stable environment in a country post-conflict is to pacify the factions involved in the conflict through demilitarisation of forces (DPKO 2008). Best practice in these situations is the establishment of DDR programmes. All the three components of DDR –disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration – are designed to have an effect on the status and networks of the soldiers (DPKO 2000). While disarmament intends to carry the soldiers from military to civilian status, demobilisation breaks the bonds of the chain of command and the “war networks”. All these changes directly affect identity. As Jenkins (1996: 4) claims, identity is not “just there”; it must always be established and it is in continuous evolution.

The establishment of UNMIL was intended to
support the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the peace process;

protect United Nations staff, facilities and civilians; support humanitarian and human rights activities; as well as assist in national security reform, including national police training and formation of a new, restructured military. (UN 2003)

The authorised strength of UNMIL was up to 15,000 military personnel, including up to 250 military observers and 160 staff officers, and up to 1,115 civilian police officers, including units to assist in the maintenance of law and order throughout Liberia, and the appropriate civilian component (SC 2003).

Alongside the establishment of UNMIL, the CPA led to two other significant events. The first was the establishment of a transitional government, the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL). This two-year authority was followed by elections on 11 October 2005 (and the election of Africa's first woman president), as well as the implementation of a national process of DDRR for the combatants of the three warring factions.

However this second task (the implementation of the DDR) was not as simple and quick as had been hoped. The incomplete framework for the process within the CPA, where it is represented by only one page in the document, with no timetable or specific standards, slowed down the implementation of the DDRR programme. According to the DDR manual (DPKO 2000), certain factors are essential in the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process. The absence of some of them from the agreement must be considered in order to explain what went wrong in the Liberian process. Some key elements that should have been specified in the peace agreement, such as the timeframe and the methods of disposing of collected weapons and ammunition, were missing from the document. In addition, the functions and responsibility of the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR) – established under the CPA, which was to provide policy guidance to a Joint Implementation Unit (JIU) for coordinating DDRR activities – were not clear. This lack of clarity and detail led to chaos. In order to address the confusion, in October 2003 a multidisciplinary team composed of United Nations officials, donors and NGOs developed an action plan (NCDDRR 2003) to fill the gaps in the implementation of the DDRR, specifying the institutional framework, operational strategy and policy guidelines to be followed.

Disarmament started in December 2003 at Camp Schiefflin in Monrovia, and

ended with the reintegration process, and its formal closure by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on 21 July 2009. The core purpose of the DDDR was to contribute to security and stability in post-conflict Liberia so that recovery and development could take place. It was an inclusive programme, using the functions of the UN agencies as well as international and local NGOs. As stated above, the policy guidelines for the programme were outlined in the action plan (UN 2003), which included a strategic framework, developed by a multidisciplinary team a few months after the signing of the CPA. In the initial process of designing and implementing the DDDR programme, a taskforce was established which included key stakeholders in the country as well as local organisations and special interest groups. This interim taskforce was composed of the UNDP, UNMIL, OCHA, USAID, UNICEF and World Vision and, after a series of consultations, produced a comprehensive document that guided the DDDR process during subsequent years (UN 2003).

As a result of this action plan, the first move was to create a JIU that had to follow the policy guidance given by the NCDDRR and had primary responsibility for the implementation of the programme. The JIU was composed of the DDDR unit that wrote the action plan, the UNDP and the NTGL. The programme dealt with the problems which arose when former fighters were left without a livelihood or support networks other than their former comrades during the transition from conflict to peace. By removing their weapons and taking them out of a military context, the DDDR programme aimed to integrate them socially and economically into society. By directly including the former fighters in the country's national development and reconciliation through humanitarian assistance, restoration of order in society, economic growth and development and comprehensive reintegration, long-term peace and security could be achieved in Liberia (UNDP 2006).

The operational framework worked as an umbrella for the four parts of the programme. Disarmament and demobilisation of the fighters took place at cantonment sites in the respective areas of the three main armed factions who signed the CPA. This phase of the process started in Monrovia on 7 December 2003. Only a small part of the peacekeeping force, totalling just 5,000, was deployed in Liberia at the time (UNDP 2006). This first phase took place at Camp Schiefflin, where nine people died after some former fighters lost their patience as they waited to be registered, and started a riot. After a period of regrouping and changing some aspects of the

disarmament, the process only started in the counties away from Monrovia on 15 April 2004, by which time the full UNMIL force of 15,000 was deployed. The DD phase was officially completed countrywide on 4 November 2004; around 103,000 fighters had been disarmed and some 101,500 demobilised (UNDP 2006). The numbers differ in various reports, if only slightly. The difference is accounted for by the number of validated participants versus those screened at Camp Schiefflin (when the database was not functioning). There were possibly unaccounted groups from the Schiefflin operations in December 2003 and also a small number of cases of spontaneous reintegration.

The Disarmament and Demobilisation procedure involved collecting weapons, documentation, the control and disposal of arms, the formal discharge of active combatants from the chains of command and armed groups and, in certain cases, counselling. A second stage of demobilisation included the support package provided to demobilised soldiers under what was termed “reinsertion”. The requisite for any Liberian to enter this process was the handing-over of a weapon; after discharge from the cantonment sites and transportation to their communities, the former soldiers received the first half of a Transitional Safety-net Allowance (TSA) of US\$150 and a one-month food ration (NCDDRR 2004). The second payment of the TSA, of the same amount, was paid after a three-month gap, at the ex-soldier’s preferred area of settlement. Originally, the stay in the cantonment sites for demobilisation was planned to be 30 days, while that for disarmament lasted just a few hours. The huge number of participants in the process – three times what had been anticipated – led to the decision to set a much shorter stay of five days per person during the actual implementation phase. In practice, this eventually lengthened to between five and 14 days (NCDDRR 2004). The brevity of the stay meant that an important part of the psycho-social counselling was not carried out in a coherent manner. This is an important starting point for part of my hypothesis. The abrupt change in the Liberian situation was not adequately understood by the fighters, who had no help and only a short time to get used to the new social circumstances. Another feature lacking in the DDRR programme was the rehabilitation process which, according to the final report of UNDP (2006), was never developed for adults and simply got lost in the operation.

Reintegration projects started in June 2004, six months before the end of the DD phase. About 98,000 (UNDP 2006) (this number also varies slightly between

reports) demobilised former fighters received reintegration assistance in the form of vocational training and formal education. According to the definition of reintegration in the mid-term reports on the DDR programme by UNDP, “Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income ...” (UNDP 2006: 4). This assumption that reintegration is about the former soldiers regaining civilian status is another fundamental issue.

1.3 The range of relevant literature about reintegration and marginalisation processes in Liberia

The previous paragraphs demonstrate how a civil war broke out, devastating Liberia and leading to widespread destruction and thousands of migrants, fleeing their homes and seeking food and a safe place to rest before moving on again. What began as a war of revenge for ethnic reasons concluded as a war without rules and little room for compassion. The Liberian context, especially focusing on the events that preceded the peace agreements, suggests that discrimination and marginalisation was already part of the Liberian problem. As the research is focused on the relationship between civilians and ex-combatants after the conclusion of the conflict, some paragraphs provided an insight into the events of the peace process rather than the conflict itself.

Having recognised the presence of marginalisation in Liberian society it is time now to review some research projects closely related to this topic. While the following paragraphs summarise and bring together the range of literature present in the field presenting different methodologies and purposes, Chapter 2 relates some of the ideas of the present literature to the thesis in order to compose an accurate theoretical framework.

1.3.1 Assessing the major research trends and area of interest of the current literature

Since the research problems identified after my first visit to Liberia concerned the relationship between the ex-combatants and civilians and its effect either on the reintegration or marginalisation of ex-combatants, I decided to begin with a critical review of the literature that has been produced about these two areas of interest. While for the marginalisation process my thesis takes into consideration a substantial

part of the literature on West Africa, regarding the reintegration of the ex-combatants the thesis centres attention on the studies focusing only on Liberia, in order to accurately position this work within a wider disciplinary discussion. This decision also ensures that the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of the Liberian process are respected. This is due to the distinctiveness of the Liberian social political and historical background and the uniqueness of the country's DDRR programmes.

With the intention of developing a constructive analysis of the body of current knowledge, this thesis brings together the multiplicity of concepts into a few key themes grouped according to methodology and purpose of the research. In term of methodology, the trend of many studies has been based on surveys focusing on numbers and statistics (Pugel 2006; Bøas and Hatløy 2008; Hill, Taylor and Termin 2008). According to this methodology, former fighters are mostly considered as mere numbers or statistics for the measurement of the success or failure of the operations in action. How many former fighters have been disarmed? How many of them passed through the reintegration process? How many of them gained employment? 'How many...?' was the usual question for which answers were sought. A most radical position of these studies is represented by a donor-driven literature (HRW 1995, 1997; NCDDRR 2003, 2004; UNDP 2006; UNOWA 2005) "that has tended to abstract the challenge of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration from their political and historical context" (Berdal and Ucko 2009: 11) producing reports or publications. In terms of purpose this literature, born contemporaneously with the conflict, answers the need of the international groups funding the reintegration programmes to investigate results, in terms of quantity and time. Those providing services to the major donors, such as UN agencies, NGOs, vocational training centres, schools and so on, concentrated mainly on quantitative methods of research. The emergence of a new category of researchers enquiring about Liberia during and after the war corroborates the theory of a shift of the related literature to a more technical and quantitative approach. As Utas (2004b: 210) pointed out, formerly traditional researchers in Liberia have remained silent on the topic of war, while in recent years "fast food" research has emerged along with emergency aid. The long-term approach has been overwhelmed by a more "eat and go" methodology.

These studies have succeeded in instructing and guiding practitioners, but they have been of limited use in assisting further analysis. In the segment of literature also

using quantitative methodology, a large part (Munive 2010; Jennings 2007, 2008; Utas 2003) looks for a more comprehensive investigation of the phenomena with a purpose different from that of the reports. The tendency of these works is to put the former fighters in the front line of enquiry, asking them directly about their difficulties and what they have to say about their own reintegration. This approach produced remarkable results, especially in Sierra Leone, giving the chance for a comparative analysis in Liberia (see Humphreys and Weinstein 2005). Shifting attention from the former fighters' reintegration to marginalisation, a significant tendency of the literature on West Africa is to relate the group of excluded young people to conflict (see Reno 1993; Ellis 1995; Utas 2003; Richards 1995). Part of this literature looked to the youth as a marginal group of "lumpens" (Abdullah and Bangura 1997) responsible for the instability of certain Mano River countries. An opposing view, part of the literature such as Bøas and Hatløy (2006) that researches the young former fighters' background, sees them as ordinary people. These differing approaches represent the central part of the theoretical framework in Chapter 2.

The above definition of some areas of interest and research trends is intended to classify the current literature into some recognisable clusters. The categorisation of the works through their methodology and purpose helps to bring together the major themes of the present literature. In order to stake out the positions that are relevant for the debate of this work, the following paragraphs contain a critical review of these clusters.

1.3.2 Previous qualitative and quantitative methodologies used for understanding the ex-combatants' point of view

The available literature on reintegration on Liberia can be divided into two distinct kinds of sources, according to their purpose. On the one hand, there is the enormous production of reports (HRW 1995, 1997; NCDDRR 2003, 2004; UNDP 2006; UNOWA 2005) generated by professionals in peace-support operations for technical purposes; on the other hand, there are publications with a theoretical purpose, produced mostly by academic researchers (Pugel 2006; Bøas and Hatløy 2008; Hill, Taylor and Termin 2008; Jennings 2007, 2008). This clear division in terms of sources reflects an obvious correspondence in terms of methodology. While the technical sources are the result of quantitative methodologies, the theoretical

sources favour the utilisation of qualitative analysis with a variable inclusion of quantitative methodology. The technical sources serve their purpose, gathering information from the field through surveys and reporting them faithfully on paper. Not much analysis is done in these reports and critical engagement is lacking. The paucity of analytical comparison renders this kind of source less significant for academic purposes.

On the other hand a significant role for academic debate has been played by the other part of the literature that serves more theoretical purposes. A significant part of this literature echoes the voices of former fighters based on the survey conducted by Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein (2004) in Sierra Leone. Some researchers focused their studies on what the former fighters had to say about their own reintegration and how they saw themselves in the full process. The purpose of their study was to give:

... a systematic, quantitative and representative assessment of the dynamics of the conflict and the post-conflict period. It provides a key source of information that can help contribute to a more complete history of the conflict, evaluate the prospects for continued peace, and influence appropriate policies for intervention and post-conflict reconstruction in Sierra Leone and other regions of civil conflict. (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004: 8)

The target population surveyed was those who had been active in a warring faction for more than one month, regardless of whether or not they participated in the DDR process. 1,000 interviewees were former fighters and 250 had not taken part in the war but had been living in the same area as the former fighters. The outcomes inspired a number of papers based on empirical analysis which focused on the actual perspective and motivations of the former fighters. These investigations demonstrated that the most effective way to analyse the degree of acceptance of former fighters by both individuals and communities is to question the former fighters directly.

Pugel (2006) adopts the same research strategy in Liberia but adds a few steps. With the consent of Humphreys and Weinstein, he complemented their study in collaboration with UNDP, using a format similar to those used in Sierra Leone. The survey was conducted on a random sample of 590 former fighters with the purpose of measuring reconciliation and reintegration in Liberia. The aim was to collect socio-

economic information on the lives of the interviewees during and after the war in order to study their perceptions of reintegration.

In the same line of research, studies in Liberia have also been conducted by Hill, Taylor and Termin (2008), who proposed a new perspective for analysis of the reintegration process from the point of view of the former fighters. Their research was based on a survey, with some 1,400 interviews, conducted in the Lofa region and in Monrovia in March and April 2007. A total of 1,024 interviews with former fighters were completed in the rural area of Voinjama and another 398 interviews in the urban area of Monrovia. The primary investigation generated two interesting reports: *Helping Ex-Combatants Help Themselves: Understanding Ex-Combatant Economic Reintegration in Lofa County, Liberia* (February 2008) and *Would You Fight Again? Understanding Liberian Ex-Combatant Reintegration* (September 2008).

The primary investigation and the two subsequent reports analyse how the former fighters themselves saw their own reintegration and their future opportunities. The results pointed to both local and national priorities for their socio-economic insertion into the community. The main focus of these two works is on the probability and potential causes of former fighters returning to fight, so that the chances of them rejoining the warring factions for a possible new conflict could be measured. Both pieces of research based on the same survey, focus on understanding the “economic reasons and the psycho-social dynamics that affect [the ex-combatants’] ability to rebuild (or in the case of youth ex-combatants, build for the first time) sustainable livelihoods based on licit activities and to reintegrate into their communities” (Hill *et al.* 2008: 10). The three foci of the research are: economic reintegration, social reintegration and motivations to return to war.

Other important works using quantitative research and contribution to this field are Bøas and Hatløy (2006, 2008). The 2006 work gives a good insight into the conditions for youth in Lofa after the end of the conflict. This work does not include much about former fighters, but some pertinent points may be extrapolated for the purposes of the current study. It is, indeed, of note that only 5% of the respondents who said they had taken part in a faction had returned to their community; the authors suggest that many were displaced in Monrovia (Bøas and Hatløy 2006: 32). This finding indicated that research in the urban area of Monrovia needs to take into account that a large number of former fighters had not gone back to their home areas

and thus had not tried to recover the status they had before the war. Such displacement is one of the main aspects of the creation of new identities, especially in the case of youths who had lacked the time to acquire and institutionalise their behaviour or personality before the conflict.

Some of the sources with a theoretical purpose did not use any kind of quantitative research. For some authors, trying to understand the behaviour of the former fighters without analysing the social impact of their reintegration is like building a house without starting with the foundations. While it is an essential part of the research of some authors to examine the conditions of the fighters before the war, my research is concerned with the process they passed through at the end of the conflict, which led to the characteristics of their current status. The most relevant work based on the direct experience of former fighters rather than being structured as a survey is Utas (2003). The central focus of Utas' study is on "the experiences, motivations, and reflections of young combatants who fought for a variety of rebel factions" (Utas 2003: 2). This work, which has an ethnographic approach, analyses the category of youth and how the first civil war affected their lives. Some important aspects of youth identity analysed by Utas inspired my work. One of the central examples is the initiation to adulthood and recognition as fighters. This element helped me to define the relevance of the status of fighter attained by young soldiers. Utas (2003) can be seen as a starting point for my work but with a different focus. One of the main differences is the timing. The reintegration process analysed in my work, after the establishment of UNMIL in 2003, is in a totally different context to that of 1997 when Taylor's shadow was predominant in Liberia. Another author who avoids quantitative analysis is Jennings (2008) who, in analysing the Liberian DDR implementation in general, starts from the Bøas and Hatløy (2006) survey in order to develop a new point of view. Jennings' works are relevant in understanding the introduction of the issue of identity in order to understand the reintegration of former fighters.

The foregoing assessment of the most relevant projects on reintegration in Liberia according to methodology and purpose has two aims – firstly, to explain the choice of methodology used by this thesis and expressed in the following paragraphs; and secondly to lay the basis for developing in Chapter 2 further analysis around the ideas expressed in these works.

1.3.3 Marginalisation and conflict in West Africa

The second topic related to this thesis is the marginalisation process associated with conflict. Dealing with marginalisation and conflict in West Africa means dealing with the controversial and often “silent” group of youth (see Munive 2010; Abdullah and Bangura 1997; Peters and Richards 1998). Indeed, in Sierra Leone and Liberia, the matter of security in post-conflict reconstruction is strictly linked with the problem of youth marginalisation (see Fayemi 2004; Amadu *et al.* 2009; Shola 2006). When it comes to youngster exclusion in the Mano River countries, an extended and well-developed debate is addressed by Richards (1995, 1996, 2005), Utas (2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008), Peters (2004, 2006, 2007), Munive (2010, 2010b, 2011) and Vigh (2006). All the authors investigate the relationship between youth identity and conflict, developing different ideas but they all agree on the fact that the marginalisation of young people has been one of the reasons for the outbreak of conflict in West Africa. However, this definition of youth is not built on a logical classification based on age and does not denote a fixed demographic group (Boeck and Honwana 2005). It means that someone, say, in his forties who also has a problem of social and political integration could be considered part of the youth cohort (Utas 2009: 9). It is a social age.

When it comes to the relationship with conflict, according to Utas (2003, 2008), young people’s sense of being excluded from society represented the “social glue” for a significant group of citizens and the reason for the war in Liberia. In the same context Richards (1995) attributes the participation of youth in the conflict in Sierra Leone and Liberia to a “crisis of youth” generated by the frustration of a generation caught between traditional society and modernity. This situation was exacerbated by the abuses perpetrated by the Liberian elite on the young people, especially in the countryside. Exploitation for labour, and the lack of opportunities for youngsters, offered fertile ground for local warlords to raise insurgencies. In many cases these insurgencies are triggered by the limited access to land caused by the failure to introduce appropriate agricultural reform (Chauveau and Richards 2008)

A similar opinion is held by Peters, who also collaborated with Richards in this area (Peters and Richards 1998, 1998b). According to him

The root causes of the war, according to many ex-combatants, are located in the lack of education and jobs, and the failure or unwillingness of the ruling

elite – foremost at village level – to help and include, rather than exploit and exclude, the vulnerable and needy, particularly the young. (Peters 2007: 37)

Munive (2011) moves on from the starting point of the struggle for land of the youth described by Peters and Richards (1998, 1998b) and Chauveau and Richards (2008). The authors link the armed mobilisation of the youth to their exclusion from the social context. Youth unemployment (Munive 2010) and the issue of youth labour deployment (Munive 2011) are key issues in understanding the Liberian conflict. In addition, Munive (2011) stresses how acknowledging the consequences of youth mobilisation is key to better reintegration of ex-combatants.

All the above-mentioned literature agrees that large numbers of marginalised youth probably contributed to the wars in West Africa and in particular in Liberia; and that the conflict arose mostly from the alienation of youth generated by the lack of opportunities and denial of access to social and political life. However, when considering the background of this group there are two ways of looking at it. The classification “youth” has often been seen in different ways. Sometimes they are portrayed as a pro-active community ready to participate in political, social and economic development; at other times they are just a troubled, vulnerable and excluded group searching for an identity. This dualistic representation is well expressed by the paradox of “makers and breakers” in Boeck and Honwana (2005). As makers, youth contribute to the progress of society and at the same time they are shaped by it. As breakers, they violate the social rules, also leading to conflict, as in the case of Liberia.

In order to position youth in one category or the other, some of the literature on West Africa is primarily concerned with the reasons for them joining the factions. Based on this, some authors sought to examine the fighters’ previous education, their families and community acceptance, their employment, and criminal behaviour, if any. Part of this literature (Abdullah 1998; Mkandawire 2002; HRW 2005; Collier 1994), especially that on Mano River countries, seems to regard those who took part in the conflict as breakers. According to the UNOWA report (2005), the main reasons for youth engagement in the conflict were unemployment or idleness, commonly linked to a background of criminal behaviour or uprooted youth, as in Abdullah (1998) and Mkandawire (2002). Dufka, in her report for Human Rights Watch (HRW 2005), analyses the situation of group fighters who identified themselves as regional

warriors involved in one or more factions, fighting in different countries in the region.

A military source cited in the report portrays them as follows:

These guys form part of a regional militia I call the insurgent diasporas. They float in and out of wars and operate as they wish. They have no-one to tell them where, when and how to behave. They've been incorporated into militias and armies all over the place – Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire – and are really the most dangerous tool that any government or rebel army can have. (HRW 2005: 11)

In the HRW (2005) report, most combatants admitted that looting or the desire for material gain or wealth were the main reasons they joined up. The report concludes, however, that it was mostly crippling poverty and hopelessness that incited people to take the decision to risk their lives by joining one armed force or another.

The report of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA 2005) came up with similar results. The report sees unemployment as the central factor in the economic and political insecurity of West Africa.

“Youths who are able-bodied but unskilled, jobless and alienated, have been ready to take up arms in exchange for small amounts of money – together with the promise of recognition, looting and ‘wives’ – and are more likely to be drawn into the influence of warring factions or criminal gangs to gain this ‘empowerment’”. (UNOWA 2005: 11)

It is stated in the report that the socio-economic situation of youth in Liberia and Sierra Leone and the related marginalisation have fuelled the conflicts in the two countries and the entire region.

A study by Bøas and Hatløy (2008) asserts primarily that in many cases the youth can be considered as makers, rejecting the general analysis of former fighters in West Africa as being applicable to Liberia. Bøas and Hatløy (2008), unlike Abdullah and others, state that the former fighters did not always behave as “lumpens” or “unemployed youths, prone to criminal behaviour, petty theft, drugs, drunkenness and gross indiscipline” (Abdullah 1998: 207–208). They assume that “their wartime experience may have changed them, their mindset and their behaviour, but there is little in their background to single them out as a particular group” (Bøas and Hatløy 2008: 42). On the topic of youths joining the fighting, Bøas and Hatløy (2008) argue that one of the main reasons was to do with issues of security – the need for personal

safety and a desire to protect their family. This is in contrast to the suggestion that idleness and unemployment were motivations. The UNOWA report (2005) presented this argument and it is apparent that Boas and Hatløy (2008) reject this belief and acknowledge that security is more of an important issue for those joining the fighting. However, it must be made clear that it should be stated that although the other studies do not focus their attention primarily on this belief, does not necessarily mean that they do not believe it to be important. This presents one of the difficulties about conducting a literature review on a specific subject, because not all sources are geared towards covering every aspect that has been selected by the researcher.

Bøas and Hatløy (2008) assert that the youths who decided to join the fighting had not been marginalised in absolute terms before the outbreak of hostilities, or that they had not been marginalised any more than their peers who did not join up, who had been experiencing the same or similar kinds of treatment. They also assert that enrolment in the various factions in the Liberian civil war took place out of free will, even though most of the combatants were poor and did not have a wide variety of options. This, however, is not an explanation but an observation.

Statistics in Bøas and Hatløy (2008)'s work indicate that most civilians joined the armed groups for security reasons. It is, therefore, probable that people's decision to resume fighting with a different group was made in order to protect themselves and their families, livelihoods and local communities. It is unlikely that they were forced to join different warring factions at this stage. Evidence for this can be found in the case of people in the Mandingo towns along the Guinean border in Lofa County. Here people supported ULIMO-K in the first part of the Liberian civil war (1990–96), and LURD in the latter phase (1999–2003). Some who fought for ULIMO-K went back into the bush in 1997–98 and returned as LURD fighters in 1999 (Bøas and Hatløy 2008). Others, who had made some money in the first part of the war, returned to their home communities, started small enterprises, and then rejoined a faction at a later stage, either to protect their businesses, or in an attempt to make even more money from the war (Ellis 1995, 1999).

Based on these findings, Bøas and Hatløy (2008) conclude that most of the people who joined the warring factions did so voluntarily, based on personal reasons, and not because of marginalisation or coercion. In every society, whether in conflict or not, the individual often takes decisions under some level of coercion. There is

normally, however, a range of possibilities and the “ability to evaluate alternative coping strategies” (Bøas and Hatløy 2008: 37). They argue that similar social and economic conditions existed for the youths who joined the factions as for those who did not get involved in the conflict.

The finding that most of the enrolments took place voluntarily or out of free will is in line with Harris (1999), who says that children and young people are not always forced into hostilities. He takes Liberia as an example, stating that, judging from his experience, they are among the first to join the factions, for a broad range of motivations – whether economic (looking for some source of sustenance); security (the belief that the armies can protect them or their families), or revenge (for some atrocity perpetrated by other factions) (Bøas and Hatløy 2008). Harris (1999) argues that a large section of the population, such as young people, were already alienated from the social system, and he does not distinguish them from those involved in the war. The situation changes, however, when we look at those who have engaged in fighting and who, in the anarchy of a post-conflict situation, may turn to pillaging and armed gangs, as in Liberia (Harris 1999). Therefore, the two works on the subject agree and present the viewpoint that the decision to join the fighting is often based on security issues and not through force. This is argued against by Kieh (2008)’s work that states that a large majority of soldiers, particularly child soldiers were forced to join the conflict. Here it is apparent that the literature should acknowledge the difference between the two debates, with those of a certain age displaying a number of reasons why they chose to join but more often than not, children were forced to join (Kieh, 2008).

The literature notes that child soldiers had little choice and were often forced to join the conflict. Bøas and Hatløy (2006) deal in depth with the topic of child abduction in a report on a survey of 479 children between the ages of 10 and 18, carried out in November 2005. The authors point to pre-conceptions that these children had mostly been involved in the war because they had been forced. However, abandoning these pre-conceptions and avoiding over-simplification, we can try to understand the source of the problem and the reasons, other than force, why they got involved in the conflict in the first place. It will then be possible to develop theories and practices to improve social and economic conditions in general. This can help in the reintegration process, to reduce and combat child labour, and to improve the

current social and economic conditions of youths (Bøas and Hatløy 2006).

According to these points of view most of the former fighters came from stable family backgrounds, but it is possible that they were influenced by outside forces, having left the family and community surroundings and been subjected to the harshness of the war. As a result, and not unexpectedly, it is possible that they may have become involved in crime. Collier (1994) is of the same opinion, stating that the former fighters who are unskilled have “comparative advantage in criminal activities” (Collier 1994: 344). Following this theory, Collier demonstrated that the former fighters cannot go back to normal civilian life because of their lack of skills and that the unemployment can be a cause of destabilisation

It is clear that there is a discrepancy between former fighters with a more normal background, as described by Bøas and Hatløy (2008) and the warriors deeply affected by poverty and discrimination as described by Abdullah (1998). Those described by HRW (2005) and Abdullah (1998) mostly indicated the symptoms of the marginalised part of society: unemployment or under-employment, struggling for daily survival, vulnerability to exploitation, and so on. This is a key part of the analysis and assesses that certain former fighters are more susceptible to becoming marginalised depending on their background, even before joining the army and the identity change that they might experience.

1.3.4 Observations on the current literature and development of current methodology

The major foci of the literature focusing on reintegration analysed above, including especially technical reports and working papers from the UN, government agencies and research groups, are the result of a methodological approach based on quantitative data from surveys. However, research about ways of effectively addressing the difficulties and constraints that the reintegration process is likely to confront can be characterised as inadequate. Such studies seem to lack a deep and extensive analysis in terms of explaining the complex dynamics which derive from the interaction between conflict management strategies and their impact on the local population. It is interesting to see how these same authors, using the quantitative approach, have started to notice the need for further investigations.

Some authors, not involved directly in studies in Liberia, such as Tatsuo

Yamane, who conducted research into peacekeeping and peacebuilding in various African countries, affirm that not much research has been conducted on DDR as related to the reintegration of former fighters in general (Tatsuo & Yamane 2007). Specifically in Liberia, Hill, Taylor and Temin (2008: 10), who conducted an overall survey with CHF International and published the outcomes in a special report of the United States Institute of Peace, state: “There is a relatively thin body of literature that looks critically at factors affecting the economic and social reintegration of ex-combatants”. They consider that most of the studies carried out in Liberia are focused on the success of vocational training and the statistics for the former fighters participating in it; and that, apart from that, little research is centred on the economic and social reinsertion of the former fighters, based on how they see themselves in the process as a whole. A similar view is expressed by Jennings (2008), where one of the problems in understanding how DDR is acting at a micro-level is the lack of studies into how it is implemented “on the ground”. The author also suggests that reintegration in general is still under-researched and under-resourced compared with a large volume of work dealing with the demobilisation and disarmament process.

Regarding literature on DDR, the writer also differentiates between the large volume of operational works and more analytical studies. The first, considered by Jennings (2008) as “gray literature”, consists of technical guides and reports of programme implementation, while the second consists of those works where the main aim is to analyse in a critical way the effects produced by the DDR process in specific contexts on the ground. Pugel (2006), similarly based on a broad survey of former fighters, also stresses that DDR programmes have been studied with positive outcomes at the macro level but little has been done to validate this at the micro level. It appears that many of the major researchers on reintegration have been pointing out the need for additional research in the field, which might address some of the gaps.

This thesis tries to fill some of these gaps using a different approach, especially regarding the methodology. Most of the studies are based on large-scale surveys with questionnaires and short, open-ended interviews. This quantitative approach leaves little scope for qualitative interpretation. For this study I conducted open-ended interviews and focus groups to examine the social aspects of being a former fighter in Liberian society, rather than gathering statistics on how former fighters view the reintegration process. In terms of purpose, this study is different

from surveys commissioned or funded by non-state actors because it aims to embrace a larger target audience than just the technicians in the field.

Most of the literature on youth marginalisation and conflict in West Africa, as seen above, has focused on the period before the war and what caused youth to mobilise for conflict. The only relevant work with a post-conflict setting was Utas (2003), focused on the end of the first phase of the end of the Liberian civil war, which established a definite need for a follow-up after the end of the second phase of the war. Not much literature has described how the evolving state of the marginalisation process after the end of the conflict affects ex-combatants as a specific group of the population. There is a potential gap of literature dealing with how youth marginalisation evolved after the end of the conflict. There is hence a need to narrow the area of interest to the period after the war and to ex-combatants.

1.4 Personal conversations with former fighters: the appropriate methodology in a military environment

“Methodology is a rather neglected topic in studies of under-age combatants” (Utas 2004b). According to Utas (2004b), the quantitative approach and short-term fieldwork are the methodological keys for much research. In a large number of cases this approach responds to the purpose of the technical sources cited in the paragraph above. Like the studies on young combatants, analysis of the methodologies used to study the reintegration process of former fighters after conflicts in many countries reveals the extent to which they are depersonalised – in other words, treated as “numbers”. Liberia is a perfect example of this.

This happens mostly because the rehabilitation and reintegration process after war is implemented in an armed environment characterised by military involvement, which favours the use of reports and surveys as the methodology for gaining information. Most modern peacekeeping operations involve DDR programmes in their mandate. So did the CPA signed in Accra after the end of the Liberian war as a central part of the UN peacekeeping operation. Most of the research in the field took place in a military environment (see Utas 2003; Jennings 2007; Munive 2010). This military setting characterised most of the works’ methodology, and particularly those linked to reports on numbers and goals (see Pugel 2006; Bøas and Hatløy 2008; Hill,

Taylor and Temin 2008). Whilst my fieldwork was also in a military environment, the research I conducted is based on qualitative data including sociological elements and long-term fieldwork and recurrent revision. I dispensed with the use of quantitative surveys and carried out personal conversations face to face that would reveal the former fighters' feelings and attitudes in a more rounded and richer way. This methodological approach aims to give a voice to the ex-soldiers and whether or not they perceive themselves as part of society.

The study thus analyses the day-to-day integration of the ex-soldiers in Liberian social and economic circles, adding scientific credibility to the research by using a rigorous methodology. Since the interaction between former fighters and civilians is the core of this research, the decision to use qualitative methods was made with the aim of giving space to what has been neglected in other similar investigations: the voices of the ex-combatants. Listening to the words of the former fighters responds to the intention of describing the development of the reintegration process in the way it was conceived and realised in Liberia, rather than explaining it. The only way to achieve this is to understand the concept of reintegration process through the comments of the ex-combatants, collecting as many of their opinions as possible.

With this in mind, my role during data collection was to look at the occurrence of events "from the outside", grasping the subjective consciousness of human conduct. During the research I first had to play the role of an observer as a social participant and then to replicate the reality of those with whom I had interacted, in social terms. The full first phase of the fieldwork consisted of observing the interaction between former fighters and the local population. The second part of the composition of the thesis was the interpretation of the data and writing the thesis. Indeed, in interpretative social science the task of the scientist is not to impose an "outside" view of the phenomenon but to interpret it through an "inside" experience of the observer himself. Hence, the aim of this methodology was to report the stories of the social interaction of the former fighters with external society, describing through their voices the daily struggle for reinstatement in a normal life involving social activity.

Since the subjective description of social interaction cannot be measured in terms of numbers and statistics, I avoided the use of surveys and questionnaires.

Interpretivism, indeed, is not suited to the quantitative approach, but rather the qualitative method, which serves to define the choices that led to certain behaviours (Blaikie 2000). When I approached the phenomenon of the reintegration of the former fighter I was not interested in the number of ex-combatants that declared they were reintegrated into society, but the reason behind those declarations. The only way to do that was to hear the motivations for their decision to stay among others or to become isolated, focusing on their feelings instead of the numbers and statistical patterns that they may give rise to.

During the observation phase I planned to capture the “subjectively intended meanings” of the research participants by maintaining an “objectifying attitude” (see Harrington 2000: 728). At the end of the observation process, my intention was to portray a landscape where the ex-combatants could recognise themselves and, further, to reproduce their reality in the appropriate social formats. To generate this kind of understanding through interpretation, I wanted to reproduce the social phenomenon with as much of an inside view as possible. This method must avoid altering the social actors’ world by altering their reality. The only way to remain faithful to the facts is to allow the observed actors to speak for themselves, and to maintain the role of observer with the task of accurately decoding their statements in social terms. Avoiding the euphemism of being a “faithful reporter”, I accepted the post-positivists’ point of view (see Trochim 2001) that no individual can ever be truly objective and unbiased in their views of an experience and hence of the world; all personal viewpoints are biased to an extent.

The following paragraphs address technical issues concerning the investigation such as *how*, *where*, *when* and *which*. I structured the fieldwork seeking an understanding of the concept of reintegration among the former fighters by means of description and exploration of the social reality of their lives. I also discuss in this section how I decided where to conduct the interviews, and the particular reasons for these choices are discussed setting the limits and boundaries of the study. I also tackle the matter of timing and timeline as practical application of the research strategy during the fieldwork, detailing the procedures of data collection as personal conversations.

1.4.1 Fieldwork: timeline, places and methods to avoid “victimcy”

In defining the research timeline it is necessary to consider the two main formats: cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. In a longitudinal study, the focus is spread over a wider spectrum of time (usually many decades); many variables are involved and changes that occur over time are taken into account before concrete conclusions are drawn. In a cross-sectional study, the entire focus of the research is confined to a single timeframe (Trochim 2001). Only a segment of the entire spectrum of the subject being studied or measured is concentrated on. Due to the relatively short period of my research (five years) we can consider this research to be in the cross-sectional format.

In this timeframe I visited Liberia four times between 2005 and 2009 in order to collect specific data. The total fieldwork was of seventeen months, with intervals of a few months between each visit, lasting between three and six months. However before going out into the field, the first step in the research included a year in Edinburgh where I familiarised myself with data collection and analysis methods. During this first year I designed a fieldwork strategy that could allow the collection of data regarding all the actors involved in the reintegration process of the ex-combatants. At that stage I identified two major groups involved in the process. In one group are actors not directly or personally affected by the actions, those who are responsible for designing strategies and policies for the full process but do not experience the consequences. In this group I place mostly collective bodies such as the United Nations and its agencies, NGOs, civil-society organisations (CSOs), government entities, etc. The other group is formed by the individuals directly affected by the process such as the communities, the civilians and the ex-combatants.

Clearly, each of them plays a different role and operates at a different level of the reintegration process. If we consider the process with a hierarchal approach we find at the top of the structure the first group. This party represents the bureaucratic machinery for the coordination of the whole process. They lay down the policies, the economic directives and the guidelines for the practical implementation of the reintegration process. At a lower level is the second group who, even if the main subject of the process, just suffer the process without any involvement in decision-making.

Throughout the period in Edinburgh I set up the future fieldwork in Liberia in accordance to this division. My first visit was in 2005, between September and December (four months), and was taken up with familiarising myself with the environment, the context and the people. For this period I decided to start gathering information about the first group. The method was to hold formal interviews. I interviewed the main members of staff of institutions and organisations involved in the Disarmament and Demobilisation process that was ongoing by that period. The main goal of this sequence of interviews was to get information to delineate the main successes and failures of the work already done, and to identify the strengths and the weaknesses of the work still in progress. This approach was totally separate and just for background purposes.

By contrast, I decided to interact with the second group in a more informal way. During this phase of the research, I collaborated also with a local association of ex-combatants which was running an independent reintegration agenda for around 200 former fighters in the Margibi area. I was mostly based in Monrovia, where I was carrying out part of the fieldwork, and I travelled every day to a small area in Margibi County, called the Schiefflin Community. The travel time was around one hour each way but, if only a short distance apart, the two locations were completely different, one rural and the other urban. This association was not part of the formal mechanism of the peacekeeping operation and not orientated only around former fighters. The group was completely informal and joined together all war players: victims and perpetrators. I took an active part in this association during the three visits followed the first in 2005. In fact I visited Liberia again between May and October 2006 (six months), June and August 2007 (three months) and finally, after a break of more than one and half years, between May and August 2009 (four months).

This long-lasting collaboration with a local entity that was a spontaneous part of Liberian civil society and not linked with the international organisations gave me the opportunity to be accepted on a different level by the former fighters. Acceptance and trust were developed meticulously through participation and presence; suddenly I found that I had become “part of the landscape”. There was no pre-planning in this, as this kind of development happens unexpectedly or through unplanned situations (see Utas 2004b). I developed further relationships with other former fighters not taking part in the association. The whole “trust building approach” was set up with the

purpose to avoid the ‘victimcy’ problem. With the term “victimcy” Utas (2004b: 211) defines the attitude of the “respondents expressing their individual agency by representing themselves as powerless victims”. It is a form of defence that allows the respondents to hide themselves behind a curtain of false stories that can in some cases mislead researchers. This situation is common in post-conflict environments especially if the focus of the work is those during the reintegration processes who live at the margins of the society, which in many cases pushes them to their isolation. These people tend most of the time to picture their circumstances in a more colourful way than was the reality. Victimcy can in these cases compromise the validity or authenticity of the research. Even the slightest error can invalidate the entire research.

For any form of qualitative data, authenticity lies in the integrity, depth and capacity of the data collected, along with the targeted sample and an unbiased approach. However, it should be noted that, over the years, many diverse methodologies have been recommended for quantitative data analysis, but no universally accepted strategy has been designed for qualitative data analysis (Saunders *et al.* 2003). I decided therefore to begin from the safe understanding that in order to avoid the problem of victimcy it is necessary to gain real acceptance that in many cases derives only from long-term fieldwork. Since the time spent on the field during my visits was often long and the interval between the visits was quite short, I decided to use progressive and systematic approaches to integrate myself in the ex-combatants’ communities. This was planned with the aim, through participant observation and informal conversations, of describing the social reality from the point of view of the former fighters. Listening directly to them and trying to be fully accepted implied of course avoiding the use of surveys. This was because many ex-combatants had been involved in paper-based surveys previously in the demobilisation exercises with “strangers” they often did not trust. In these cases victimcy may often have compromised part of the information due to the formal relationship with the researchers. My aim was instead to elicit information from the former fighters without affecting my relationship with them and without creating any distance between us.

The only way to gain this kind of acceptance from the former fighters was through real participation. I decided so to spend time at their meeting places, their formal and informal work places and inside the organisations they created. I aimed to

“see and feel” the everyday activities of the former fighters through a process involving a complex range of actions that helped me to perceive their social reality from different points of view. The involvement in their day-to-day activities opened a “gate” of acceptance that allowed me to become part of a system that permitted me to be constantly in contact with the ex-combatants. This “gate” of acceptance meant that I became a trusted person, with entry to their networks.

Nevertheless the first period was quite problematic since the process of social adaptation in a country locked in more than 15 years of isolation due to civil war was not easy. My white Caucasian background was also an issue. In most of the country, including the capital city, the sight of a white man aroused the curiosity of the majority of the population, especially those in their 20s or younger. The recent war and the closure of Liberia’s frontiers for most of the previous 15 years did not allow many non-Liberians, and especially “whites”, to enter Liberia. For obvious historical reasons, people assumed I was American before knowing my nationality, and this led to presumptions that were difficult to remove. I overcame this initial barrier with the help of a “loyal associate”. The choice of this term is quite unusual, but suited to the situation. This individual played many roles during my stay in Liberia. He was a guide, assistant and adviser; he sometimes held me back, making me considering ideas and theories from different points of view; but more than anything he was a loyal support for this research. The role played by this individual could not be fully understood if he would be considered simply as a “fieldwork assistant”. There was no formal job interview or employment, no salary (apart from reimbursement of some expenses) or hierarchical relationship.

Everything happened spontaneously when I found accommodation in a hotel in Monrovia. The woman who owned the hotel named Watta Modad was the centre of a variety of activities, from political to humanitarian, and had a range of interests and connections in different fields. Among her long list of interests, she collaborated in January 2005 with Paul Richards and Steven Archibald on research for the World Bank in Liberia (WB 2005). She introduced me to one of her nephews, the loyal associate who proved reliable and useful throughout my fieldwork. The war had not spared him. He fought and had lost both his parents and other family members during the fighting, while other family members were displaced. This experience gave him a strong will to lend a hand in my effort to understand the Liberian situation. He had

benefited from a privileged high-school education, which is unusual in Liberia, and was enrolled at the University of Liberia. Born in Monrovia, where he has lived for most of his life, he also had the experience of being a refugee in Sierra Leone for several months. He also had some experience as a journalist's assistant and worked for his aunt gaining substantial knowledge of the UN programmes for the reintegration of the ex-combatants. He introduced and led me through the former fighters' networks and on some occasions also the underground world. Thanks to his presence, in a short period of few months I passed from being tagged "white man" to "white nigga".

I visited different counties and spent a month in Sanniquellie in Nimba county. The "gate of acceptance" was open but having established this relationship based on trust, I could not create a barrier between me and them by formalising the interviews with a structured framework. I thus adopted, as a means of data collection, the method of unstructured and informal interviews, which, for most of the time, reduced the sharp differences between us. My target was individuals, work groups and organisations made up of ex-combatants. The conversations were on a one-to-one level or conducted in groups. Depending on the situation, all the conversations were held in public places or places chosen by them, so as to ensure a safe and comfortable environment, such as in local bars, sometimes also sharing some palm wine. The majority of the participants were already familiar with my presence within their closer networks and did not see me in an official capacity. None of the conversations was arranged by appointment; they were of a more spontaneous nature, so as to create a trusting atmosphere and encourage people to confide in me. I always carried an audio-recorder; in some cases it was hidden (I always asked for permission to use the material after the conversations were over), in others overt. Over time the participants became so accustomed to me recording our conversations that they no longer took any notice and began to speak more freely. Most of the conversations quoted in this thesis come from audio-recorded material. The conversations are presented in the thesis as "pers. comm." (personal comments), while the formal interviews are presented as "interviews".

The selection of comments to use for the research was partly pragmatic and partly the result of fulfilling criteria planned during the design of my research in Edinburgh. For the purpose of restricting the area of interest I decided to select

conversations held in certain districts based on their grouping in urban and semi-urban areas. I decided to leave the rural areas aside because the data might be too contradictory for my purpose. For the first and only time in my research, I decided my target selection based on information from the much-criticised quantitative data. I needed a starting point and I decided to screen some statistics to point out the right direction. According to the NCDDRR (2004) report, Montserrado county as an urban area and Margibi county as a semi-urban area were in fact among the preferred places for resettlement and reintegration of demobilised soldiers. The report, which by that time had surveyed 83,601 ex-combatants, pointed out that 50% of those interviewed chose Margibi and Montserrado counties as the final destination for their demobilisation. Furthermore, some 48.13% of interviewees indicated the two counties as their preferred place for resettlement during the reintegration activities. Based on this initial information I decided to focus my fieldwork on these two areas.

In selecting the comments I also gave some importance to statistics when choosing the age of the participants. As it was my intention not to reproduce any particular model but, rather, to reflect on the range of processes and behaviours of the subjects of study, I did not restrict the representative sample just to an age range, but I took it into consideration. I tried, where possible, to adhere to the age ratio of the figures produced by the Disarmament and Demobilisation programme. The survey conducted during the DD process showed that those aged between 20 and 30 represented 63% of the entire number of former fighters (NCDDRR 2004). I decided therefore to target individuals and groups mostly aged between 20 and 30 years. In none of the cases did I ask a participant to present a former fighter's ID card, for two reasons in particular. First, many former fighters had not passed through the DDR programme so as to get the ID, or did not want to carry the ID with them. Secondly, asking for identification would have broken the trust created. The only way to identify them as former fighters was confirmation by other members of the community or close networks.

1.4.2 Methodological comparative analysis with Utas

Carrying out research in the field I finally came to a point where I considered comparative analysis an essential step for portraying the methodology used. Comparison is, in fact, an unavoidable step in social science to fully describe the

object of the research: “the fundamental point is that all description involves a comparison of the object described with something else” (Bechhofer and Paterson 2000: 6). In order to understand fully the reasons for some methodological choices I decided to contrast my work with a previous one. Considering qualitative data as the hub of my research, the most relevant work on ex-combatants in Liberia using this approach was Utas (2003). This work is an “ethnography of youth in Liberia and of how their lives became affected by a civil war which raged in the country between 1990 and 1997” (Utas 2003: abstract). The central focus of the study is on “the experiences, motivations, and reflections of young combatants who fought for a variety of rebel factions” (Utas 2003: abstract). Utas’ fieldwork was conducted among young ex-combatants between December 1997 and November 1998 (Utas 2003). However, my study should not in any way be considered a secondary analysis or a replication of Utas’ work, either in terms of findings or of methodology.

My thesis clearly cannot be considered a secondary analysis. This would involve the use of the same existing data, collected for the purposes of a prior study, in order to pursue a research interest which is distinct from the original (Hinds, Vogel and Clarke-Steffen 1997). This is not so in the case of my work since all the data were collected by me. In term of replication, research such as Pugel (2006) and its replication of Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein’s work in Sierra Leone “heavily relied” upon the methodology used in the original work. My research instead used the methodology based on the requirements on the ground rather than a planned reproduction of Utas’. Even if I agree completely on the type of data collection labeled by Utas (2003: 9) as “deep hanging out with Liberian youth ex-combatants”, I used it more as a philosophical attitude than a proper methodology. I planned my contribution to the ex-combatants’ associations and networks through real participation in their activities of any kind. I organised and participated in activities ranging from political debates to basketball matches and in many other cases also took part in more spontaneous events, such as drinking with the ex-combatants in bars.

All this was due especially to the different timing of the research. I analyse the reintegration process of demobilised soldiers during the UNMIL operation established in 2003, in a totally different context to that of 1997 when Taylor’s shadow was predominant in Liberia. The atmosphere and environment during my research were

more relaxed, secure and free than during Utas' fieldwork. A secure environment completely changes data collection methods. For example I never felt that the local authorities or others might confiscate my material and I never had issues concerning my personal security. Even during several visits to the Guthrie Rubber Plantation, a cultivated rubber area seized and controlled by ex-combatants, I did not feel any danger. My last visit to the plantation was only the day before the military's deadline for the ex-combatants to leave the place. Most of them were packing their possessions and were getting ready to depart, with a pointed "no comment" in their eyes; others were thinking of fighting to hold the government back. I approached some of the leaders and, despite their anger, was able to have conversations with no complications. This was due to the change of climate brought about by the 2003 peacekeeping operation. The organisations I was participating in were mostly demobilised and their members no longer recognised the military hierarchy. That was why I did not experience the exclusion from a network when a new leader overthrows the previous one, as happened to Utas in the "Palace". Moreover, although I did not share common ground with the former fighters by having been – like Utas – in Liberia on "April 6" [1996], I was often seen as one of them because I had served in the army (1-year national service was compulsory in Italy until 2000), and I did not have to pretend to be an ex-soldier like them. Finally I can confirm that the new secure context I was operating in deeply influenced the difference between Utas' research methods and mine.

1.4.3 Terminology

Some terms used in this thesis have different meanings depending on the context they are used in, so it is necessary to clarify them by giving them specific meanings.

The first definition concerns two terms used throughout this work: *former fighter* and *ex-combatant*. These terms are interchangeable with no distinction. Both expressions imply a person who took part in the conflict at any stage of his or her life, anyone who joined the factions to fight or to support fighting in any kind of way. Therefore, there is no differentiation between those who were forced to join the war and those who willingly decided to take part; nor between those who fought in the field and those who worked in the camp kitchens; and there is no differentiation based on gender, age or ethnic group. None of these characteristics is important in the

context of my thesis. They refer to anyone who took part in the conflict, regardless of which faction.

Sometimes synonyms such as warrior, soldier, rebel or combatant are used with no difference, leaving aside in this case the distinction between the terms made by Moran (1995). According to Moran (1995) the semantic use of the term “soldier” indicates the first step of a chronological evolution of the ideal of fighters. When the figure of soldier has been discredited by corrupt and coward behaviour, the ideal of fighters changed to different models: warriors, commando and so on. The soldier represents square zero of the model of fighters during the journey of identity evolution (Moran 1995), but I do not subscribe to this terminology.

The expression “neglected veteran” is used to identify the category of former fighters experiencing particular feelings after the end of the conflict by not feeling fully reintegrated. Everyone who took part in the war was a fighter or a combatant, but certain specific emotions generated after the end of the conflict, such as abandonment, rejection, marginalisation and discrimination – which will be analysed in the following chapters – mark a distinctive group, the “neglected veterans”. Nevertheless, the term “former fighter” also refers to both groups, where a distinction between them is not required.

Another term that is widely used in my work is “web of connections”; it includes all the implications of three other key terms: *status*, *identity* and *networks*. The meaning of “status” is no different to that in everyday use: an individual’s social standing or position in society relative to that of other people. The term also denotes the relation of power between the individual and other people, and the individual’s ranking in society. In many cases status is not static, and changes depending on actions and general events. More specifically, the concept of status focuses on two different moments in the lives of former fighters: the dissolution of the previous status of fighters with the end of the war, and the acquisition of a new status in the aftermath. Another important term is “war network”, which refers to the whole spectrum of the social and economic relationships of the former fighters during the conflict. Status and network are connected with another important concept: *identity*. The identification process of the former fighters in this thesis is focused on their perception of how others see them – in other words, their own perception of their identity within society. This identity is not a heritage from the past but is transformed

within a different, changed environment. Status, attitudes, relationships, networks and other conditions that arise after the end of the war together help to transform the previous identity.

1.5 Conclusion

This introductory chapter served to set the boundaries of this thesis historically, methodologically and in the universe of literature. First of all the research problems identified during the initial phase of the research led the discussion on two major areas of interest: the reintegration process and youth marginalisation. A critical look at the existing research attempted to understand what other scholars have been writing on these topics, clustering them according to their methodologies and the purposes of their work. Part of the chapter was devoted to analysing the approach in the literature to the phenomenon of the former fighters. Most of the previous works on this topic are survey-based, using quantitative data as a basis for the elaboration of theories. It will be the principal intent of the next chapter on the theoretical framework to relate the specific thesis of some of these works to my research.

The second part of the chapter, regarding the series of events that led Liberia to the CPA that established peace in 2003, described the marginalisation and discrimination experienced by part of the Liberian population during their history. The series of conflicts followed by the ceasefire exacerbated a situation that was already at the limit. Understanding these events is essential in evaluating the effects on the personality and behaviour of the former fighters. Finally, the last part of the chapter explained the tools and the methodology applied in the research and the fieldwork.

Chapter 2: Theoretical foundations of the marginalisation and reintegration processes

2.1 Introduction

Most of the time when there is meeting in our town and me or some of my friends who fight the war get up to talk our own ideas, the big community people and some others will not even give me the chance to talk. Sometimes they will say that this is no war business. When I get vexed and say something bad, they will say: “Ah! That the same thing we were saying, this man still get war business inside him”. (Paye 2009, pers. comm., 20 May)

The difficult relationship between former fighters and civilians after the war and summarised in Paye’s words was the starting point of the research problems identified in Chapter 1 (How did the relationship between civilians and ex-combatants influence the success or failure of the reintegration process?). After analysing the historical background and the relevant literature it is time to relate these research problems to the existing theories. However we have firstly to understand what success or failure of the reintegration process actually means.

We have learnt in the previous chapter to treat marginalisation and reintegration as two different processes at opposite ends of the scale. The analysis of Liberian history showed us how marginalisation and discrimination are part of the country’s past but took on different connotations depending on the period. While during earlier periods the marginalisation process was more ethnic-centred, during the last conflicts ethnicity lost its importance giving space to new kind orientated on social age. With the end of the war in 2003 the international community tried to find a solution to this long-lasting marginalisation process through a conflict resolution mechanism called the reintegration process. This instrument, part of the DDR programme, was directed at those who were marginalised for ethnic, religious or social age reasons and decided to turn to fighting. When successful those who were marginalised would find a place in society; in case of partial or total failure the marginalisation would continue, either in the same form or evolving into a different kind.

In order to analyse the result of the reintegration process in the following chapters, this chapter frames the major theories in the field. While the first paragraphs focus on marginalisation and conflict, the second part of the chapter explains the link between reintegration and identity.

2.2 Different theories on marginalisation and conflict in Liberia: ethnicity and youth

In Chapter 1 the research referred to marginalisation as a process. A relevant definition states that:

Socio-economic marginality is a condition of socio-spatial structure and process in which components of society and space in a territorial unit are observed to lag behind an expected level of performance in economic, political and social well being compared with average condition in the territory as a whole. (Sommers *et al.*, 1999: 7)

In this case marginality is seen as a dynamic concept. The central subjects of this process are the individuals, or rather, for the purpose of this thesis, classes of individuals: the social categories. The social interaction between the categories represents the central debate to address the research problem of how relationships between Liberians changed after the war. In the following paragraphs I describe the various social categories that have experienced marginalisation in Liberia in line with the characteristics of the groups and the social interaction between them.

2.2.1 Some discriminative causes of the conflict: ethnicity, “warlordism”/“factionalism”

The literature notes that there are a remarkable number of theories about marginalisation involve the investigation of the causes of conflict with the purpose of understanding the actors involved in the conflict and their varying motivations for joining the fight. The motives for war range in the literature from ethnic and warlordism tensions (Badru 2010; Ballah and Abrokwa 2003), another in terms of greed or grievance (Collier 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2004), and others as the result

of youth exclusion (Richards 1995; Utas 2003; Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot 2003). This thesis takes into account the different theories presented but also highlights that certain studies such as that by Kieh (2009) highlight that there was not one single motive for war. His thesis states that “neither the ethnic, greed-grievance nor any single variable-based theoretical framework can provide the analytical animus to explain the causes of the war”, but only an integrative model. In this manner, Kieh’s work attempts to explain that there cannot be any single motive for war and that a range of factors combine to explain the causes of an outbreak of war. This underlines a key debate in the literature but it should be stated that Kieh’s work is perhaps the most reliable because war is rarely fought over a single factor and there are usually a myriad of factors involved (Collier & Sambanis, 2005).

This viewpoint of Kieh is argued against by the literature that focuses on the nature of ethnicity as a key reason for warfare in Liberia. This reflects the difference in opinion and theoretical perspective that has been taken on warfare depending on the stance of the commentator. According to Badru (2010) the rule of law in Liberia has been undermined for years by the rule of guns. Ethnicity played a central but not exclusive role in this process of destabilisation. “Warlordism” (see Reno 1998; Harris 1999) and “factionalism” (see Outram 1997) have also played an important role in the tactic of divide and rule applied at different stages and by different actors in Liberia. While ethnicity was a predominant element of separation during the first phase of state formation (Badru 2010), warlordism /factionalism took the lead in a second phase of the war. The pragmatic application of this strategy is seen in the segregation of part of the population by a ruling elite, producing mostly discrimination and eventually marginalisation. The historic and political application of the concepts of discrimination and marginalisation are linked to the notion of exclusion. According to Wucherpfennig *et al.* (2012: 84), for example,

“ethnic exclusion is a political strategy enacted by those controlling the state. It aims to secure political, cultural, and economic interests by selectively excluding parts of the population from access to valuable political and economical goods on ethnic grounds.”

Obviously this exclusion generates security and stability problems, especially because it implies seeking revenge from those excluded in order to exploit the lately-acquired power (Wucherpfennig *et al.* 2012). An example is the active discrimination against

Americo-Liberians following Doe's coup that put an end to their predominant rule of many years, discrimination that lasted until the 1997 elections (Ballah and Abrokwa 2003).

The rebellion of the Mano and Gio ethnic groups against the political suppression of the Krahn group represented another clear example of retaliation. While the first ethnic antagonism in Liberia before 1980 was between the Americo-Liberian and the indigenous population, after the Doe coup d'état the ethnic rift became one between the Krahn and the Mano and Gio. The attack on governmental forces by Taylor's NFPL in 1989 that triggered the first Liberian civil war made it clear that it was ethnic-orientated. The 1992 Taylor attack on Monrovia started what Outram (1997) defines as the "second war" (note that many authors still consider this as part of the first war).

The evidence suggests that, possibly from the Second War, but more definitely from the 'Third War' of 1994–5, ethnic identity gave way to factional affiliation as the primary cleavage in the Liberian conflicts. (Outram 1997: 361)

The ethnic factor that triggered the Liberian war in 1989 gradually vanished over time. While the earlier part of the first Liberian war was characterised by ethnic divergences, at the time of the elections of 1997 the war had shifted from issues of ethnic identity and was defined more by factional affiliation, which became the "glue" for the new groups (Ellis 1995: 183). According to Outram (1997) the ethnic dimension of the war gradually lost relevance.

This gradual shift from ethnic to factional cleavage was a consequence of some direct economic interests. Liberia was an obvious example of the fact that sometimes ethnicity is an excuse to disguise economic interests (see Gilley 2004; Kingma 2001). This line of thought leads to part of Collier and Hoeffler's thesis of "greed and grievance", focusing more on greed as a motivational cause for conflict (Collier 2000). "The late-twentieth-century wars in Liberia were, like most wars, struggles for wealth, power and revenge" (Whitehead 2004: 23). The economic agenda represented the central focus of the ruling elite of warlords excluding the rest of the population.

The abandonment of ethnicity as a reason for fighting, following the rules of

“warlordism”, gradually detached the combatants from the ethnic dimension and made them assume a factional identity. On the ground, the identification of individuals as friend or foe seemed to be no longer based on tests of ethnic identity. Instead the possession of any item linking an individual, whether voluntarily or otherwise, to a faction became the main means of identification: such as identity cards issued by the NPFL’s National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly Government, or a t-shirt bearing an NPFL slogan (Outram 1997). The rise of this new warlordism/factionalism introduced a new kind of discrimination in Liberia: “killing often appears to have been aimed at murdering any conceivable supporter of opposing factions, including those who have merely remained in place when an opposing faction has taken the area” (Outram 1997: 362). The discrimination in these cases was mostly leading to extreme violence and murdering.

However, ethnicity and warlordism/factionalism were not the only causes that lead to discriminatory behaviour and conflict. Religion and secret societies represent another element that played a central role as a cause of marginalisation (Ellis 1999). In the Liberian context, religious factors and the beliefs of the people, which are connected with the chieftaincies of the various indigenous communities, should not be underestimated. There was a degree of central political power that dominated the local villages without any problem of chieftaincy, but the government never controlled the secret societies, which played an important role in the transmission of traditional lore in “the bush” (Pham 2004). Ellis describes the “rituals of the initiation societies as the mainstays of public order in much of Liberia in pre-republican times and that survives, in radically altered form, throughout the twentieth century” (Ellis 1999). Even though Liberia was founded by Christian leaders, when it was time to rewrite the constitution in 1985, it was decided to recognise that Liberia was a multi-religious country, to leave religious differences outside state affairs, and to try to separate the state from the church. Even if most Liberians are categorised as Muslim or Catholic, there is a strong element of supernatural beliefs. “During the fighting, members of the various factions often wore religious objects, such as amulets, believing that this could make them invulnerable to bullets” (Whitehead 2004). Secret societies or sodalities, known as Poro (for men) and Sande (for women), have, for at least four or five centuries, played an important governance role in Liberia, especially in the countryside, and initiate their members into adulthood around the time of puberty

(Ellis 2004). This socio-religious interplay is a strong feature of Liberian life, where ancient secret organisations and “new”, introduced religions blend in a single body, and where traditional practices and beliefs are used as an instrument for political control.

2.2.2 Other discriminative causes of conflict: youth marginalisation

Warlordism/factionalism, with their economic implications of benefitting only the elite, did not provide sufficient reason to justify the will of thousands of young Liberians to join the factions. If ethnic marginalisation also ceased to be the central cause for the conflict, what was the alternative reason that moved a large number of Liberian to join the war?

The work of Richards (1996) avoids explaining the Liberian conflict as a purely “barbarian” and “tribal” post-colonial conflict. Richards (1995: 141) excludes ethnicity as triggering the conflict, seeing it as “an opportunity, rather than a cause of rebellion in Liberia”. The author describes the conflict in terms of a modernity crisis for youth resulting from lack of opportunities. The marginalisation of youth is in fact for many scholars (Richards 1995; Utas 2003; Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot 2003; Munive 2010b) an essential element for understanding the reasons for the Liberian conflict. In general terms, “youth” refers to a social age-range of transitional years between childhood and adulthood, which are usually marked by certain rites of passage or other defining events such as gaining employment and/or raising a family. However, the transition from childhood to adulthood is not fixed and stable (Boyden 2007; Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006; de Boeck and Honwana 2005; Munive 2010b: 36).

Youth is not defined by standard age but by social position since it is in some ways a socially constructed category. According to Abbink (2005) this category has no exact demarcation in terms of age limits (see also d'Almeida-Topor 1992). For research purposes the age range of the category can be considered between 14 and 35 years. Below this age range individuals are considered children and over it they can be considered middle-aged since they have surrendered the aspirations and ambitions of their youth. Within this age bracket are all the individuals who have not had proper education, have not obtained a job and have not accomplished their ambition of a family or an appropriate social position. The members of this category all share

feelings of exclusion and powerlessness that face the biologically younger individuals, delaying their entry into adulthood (Abbink 2005).

The term “youth” implies matters of “liminality and marginality” rather than age. Moreover, the marginalised status of the youth stimulated their participation in the Liberian war. The youngsters in Liberia exhibited inadequate participation in their communities, being under the control of the elders and leaving them with limited control or agency over their lives (Maclay and Özerdem 2010). Feeling the pressure of this “bullying” situation, many youths saw in the war the opportunity to obtain some degree of emancipation and independence (Utas 2008).

In the words of Richards (2005: 571), “the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone have been linked to the condition of urbanized youth”. The model of the war as being the result of urban criminal gangs has been replaced by the agrarian rebellion of rural youth. Whilst the socio-geographical context was different, rural youth considered themselves in the same way as the marginalised urban youth that Sommers (2003: 1) defines as “a demographic majority that sees itself as an outcast minority”. This hectic situation was at the edge and the conflict in Liberia was a consequence of the failure to address the agrarian tension of the post-colonial era, mainly damaging intergenerational cohesion (Richards 2005). Youngsters’ perception of the local systems was chiefly one of exploitation, providing fertile ground for the rebels to plant insurgencies. According to Richards (2005) then, the exclusion of youth from land tenure in the rural areas was one of the characteristics of youth marginalisation. The failing patrimonial state in Liberia was a replication of the situation in Sierra Leone, which could not cope with the needs of the youngsters who rapidly perceived the conflicts between state and rebels as an alternative solution for their “future” (Richards 1996).

Sharing some of these ideas Utas (2003: 15) says that:

young people also saw it [the war] as a youth revolution, a possibility to get rid of an elitist urban leadership made up of autocrats who showed little concern for both the young people of Liberia, and the local gerontocratic leadership. In this way, war was fought by marginalised youth who saw hostilities as possibly the only opportunity for them to experience mobility from the margins, into the centre of politics and [the] economy.

The author’s image of the war was as a reaction by the youth to the lack of

opportunities that permitted them to take possession of their own agency by taking up weapons. This prospect was enough for the young people of Liberia to push them to join the factions in order to seek upward mobility on the social ladder.

The “deficient inter-generational mobility” that Vigh (2006: 105) seems to find common in Western African societies is the dilemma that many youth face in Liberia and similar countries. The unfeasibility of the “social becoming” represents the root of the youth crisis in Liberia. To describe social becoming, Vigh (2006) introduces the concept of “navigation”, as the choices taken in order to increase their life prospects. This notion implies a movement towards a better social and economic position as construction and realisation of the social being. Vigh (2006) describes this movement as the connection between agency and social forces. Richards and Peters (1998) also give special attention to agency, using the “voice” of the former fighters as a tool to illustrate the experiences of war. The subjectivity of the description of the events allows a clear understanding, with no intermediaries, of the opinions of the young ex-combatants. My thesis uses the same methodology, leaving to the “voice” of the ex-combatants the opportunity to describe their own impression of the actual situation.

Accepting that youth dissatisfaction is among the main causes of the conflict in Liberia, there are according to Peters and Richards (1998) two reactions to this. One is to categorise the young soldiers with poorly educated background as “bandits” or “vermin”. The opposite reaction is to see them as “victims”. In this perspective many scholars consider the youth background as the main variable for this categorisation. The low educational level of young rural combatants often worked as a discriminative characteristic to label the young fighters as “barbarians”. Analysing the background of ex-combatants in several war environments, Collier (2000) suggests that there is more chance of a conflict in the presence of poorly educated youth than in ethnic tensions and repressive regimes.

Interesting research on the importance of the soldiers’ background was also carried out by Geoff Harris (1999). This work relates personal skills to criminality and rehabilitation, and explains how detachment from community and the absence of skills (developed before joining the armies) leads to a failure in reintegration. Harris presents in his work a survey conducted among soldiers in Uganda and Ethiopia before demobilisation and complements it with some sociological investigation. The

work stresses how one-third of them had no education and the majority had not been economically self-sufficient before their recruitment.

Many researchers in Liberia also support the thesis that there is a relationship between poor education, unemployment and the reason for joining the conflict. Indeed the majority of youth seeking education and employment, in a context like Sierra Leone, faced problems due to the political and economic situation in the country (McIntyre and Thusi 2003). The options were not many and choices were made with full awareness. Voicing very different opinions to other scholars, Richards (1996) notes that young people were not acting as loose molecules, as in Kaplan's (1994) theory, but in many cases chose to fight of their own free will. This is because weapon training pays quicker dividends than school ever did; soon the AK47 brings food, money, a warm bath and instant adult respect (Peters and Richards 1998: 187). Richards disagrees with Kaplan's vision of the conflict as a consequence of the social atavism, youth delinquency and environmental depletion (Rashid 2004: 66), giving a new interpretation of the Mano river battles. The youths taking part in the conflicts in western Africa were more than just uprooted illiterate adolescents. Richards claims that there were also a core group of unsatisfied intellectuals (Richards 1996). Richards therefore positions himself in contrast to the prevalent vision in the literature of a major group of academics leaded by Abdullah who embraced the idea of lumpen youth. The only common ground between both visions was the belief that conflicts gained strength through groups of marginal and discontented youth (Keen 2005). For Abdullah the war was mainly fuelled by marginal youngsters but for Richards the reason for conflict could be associated with youths from any background who were excluded from land tenure. The motivation for conflict triggered by a broad feeling of discontentment among the youths described by Richards clashes with the general idea that just small groups of war prone youngsters started the fighting (for example see Bangura 1997). This different point of view was also the major arguments in the literature between Richards and Abdullah over the lumpen debate. According to Abdullah (2008), in describing lumpen youth, there are many reasons for involvement in conflict but a greater number of youngsters involved in violence are the poor and uneducated who seem to have less to lose from involvement in violence than their counterparts. This rejects outright the claim of Richards that individuals choose to fight of their own free will and highlights that a number of factors are inherent in the

involvement of youth in warfare. The outcomes of the two scholars are very different because they start from two different assumptions. According to Abdullah (1997, Abdullah & Muana 1998) most of the youths were seen as urban drop-outs. On the other side Richards describes the young participants in the conflicts as fairly educated inhabitants of the rural areas with the aim to start an agrarian revolution (Richards 1996, Richards et al. 2003). When Abdullah et al. (1997) divide the three groups of lumpen youth; he defines those from the villages and the mining areas as drop-outs and as being socially disconnected. Their lack of sense of identity with their families and communities gave them the perfect alibi for taking part in the conflicts. This is an important concept and it should be acknowledged that the debate of the overall literature tends to side towards Abdullah's argument, particularly in terms of the view that it is the uneducated that become involved in violence and that their so-called choice is not necessarily so (Kieh, 2008). Taking these opposing views into consideration this thesis bases its starting points on commonalities from both. Both scholars, despite many differences, use the marginalisation of the youth as a point of origin for their work. In Liberia this seems to be a vicious circle as the youths involved in the war had previously experienced exclusion economically, politically or socially and so saw the war as a possible way out. However, after the war they experienced further exclusion, with the added dimension of also being excluded from the communities. This debate clearly indicates the differences held by scholars in this study and through the analysis of the marginalisation of individual former fighters in Liberia using the qualitative methodology proposed, it is important to discover whose work can be supported by the findings and those that can be rejected. Abdullah and Richards' ongoing debate is one example of this division over forms of marginalisation but the findings tend to support the beliefs of Abdullah, as noted in this discussion.

McLean Hilker and Fraser (2009: 25) discuss how youths may be more susceptible to violence because of "their stage of biological, social and psychological development" as well as the fact that "lack of opportunities faced by young people effectively block or prolong their transition to adulthood and can lead to frustration, disillusionment and, in some cases, their engagement in violence". However, the youths involved in the war suffered the added disadvantage of an often violent background due to that involvement. This legacy of violence naturally hampers the requirements of different communities for inclusion after the war. Although much of

the literature supports the notion of inequality or exclusion linked with violence, Richards (1996: 34) suggests that the youth in Sierra Leone were expressing a “youth crisis” and “reacted to exclusionary neo-patrimonial practices”. It is true that social exclusion can create an atmosphere that facilitates violence, but there is also evidence that many youths who experience exclusion are not linked to violence. According to Abbink (2005) there is an enormous number of unemployed and poor educated youth who choose not to join the factions. In fact the author says:

By their sheer numbers, their availability, and their eagerness to take up anything that may relieve them of conditions of poverty, idleness or ennui, youth are easily recruited by political parties, armed groups or criminal networks. ... Here the perception that they are all engaged in socially undesirable or criminal activities, or are unemployable (youth as lumpen, as a lost generation, etc.) is erroneous. (Abbink 2005: 3)

To support this theory, Bøas and Hatløy (2008: 41) highlight some statistics about young people in Liberia joining the factions and regarding alternative coping strategies. We see that only 11% of the interviewees responded that they had no business or nothing to do before the war started; of all those interviewed, 60% said they had enrolled in formal education and another 25% reported having been involved in some kind of business.

Statistical analysis by Bøas and Hatløy (2008: 42) brought to light substantial differences in living conditions before and after the war. Before the conflict began, 64% of those interviewed were living with parents and 12% with close relatives. Another interesting finding was that 76% of former fighters were living with parents or close relatives before the conflict (Bøas and Hatløy 2008: 42). This number is significant as it indicates that most of the youth had a structured family background before becoming involved in the conflict, refuting Abdullah’s theory on “lumpen” and uprooted youth. If we analyse the statistics related to employment, we see that before the war 11% were unemployed while after the war the rate of unemployment grew to 44% (Bøas and Hatløy 2008: 49). These findings do not give a clear explanation of the situation as there are many influencing factors on employment. It is possible to attribute the increase in the percentage of those unemployed to external economic conditions and the post-conflict economic situation of the country in general.

2.3 Theories on the reintegration process

Like marginalisation, reintegration must also be considered here as a process. In the case of Liberia, because of the post-conflict reconstruction, part of this process is characterised by the DDR. Subsequently the subjects involved are divided into only two categories: ex-combatants and civilians – recalling the initial inspiration for the research problem, the observation of the relationship between the two categories.

The series of events in the changing and unstable context of Liberia since 1989 deeply changed the nature of Liberian society. The alternation of peace and war regularly affected the Liberian population in terms of relationships, behaviour, personality and role in society. In order to analyse these factors I decided to take into consideration the transformation of three variables: status, networks and identity, which I called together the “web of connections”.

While analysis of the changes to the status and networks of ex-combatants can be carried out without particular assumptions, more attention must be paid to the examination of identity transformation. It is necessary in fact to assess some existing theories in the field. There are many theories that define the concept of identity. This work develops one of the theories that define identity not as a natural given, characterised by fixed, supposedly objective criteria, but as a process of choices that lead to certain characteristics. This approach to identity as a dynamic (Hall 1992) gives this work the fluidity needed in order to analyse an ever-changing social experience, such as that of the Liberian former fighters.

The concept of “identity” is a volatile notion and it is impossible to define it empirically. Identity is not “just there”; it must always be established (Jenkins 1996) and it is in continuous transformation. The use of identity theories as tools for decrypting the reintegration process is essential to understanding the categorisation of Liberian society and the reasons for the marginalisation of certain categories. Regarding the division of Liberians into categories, the state of transition that characterised Liberian society, caused by these changing events, made the clear identification into one category or the other very difficult. In the case of the former fighters, those who were once soldiers may have been civilians at one stage in their lives, and vice versa. From my experience on the ground, I understood how difficult it is to draw the boundary between the categories of victim and perpetrator. During

disarmament and demobilisation, for example, the only method of categorising the soldiers was based on the possession or non-possession of a weapon. If someone owned or was in possession of arms during the disarmament process, he would automatically be included in the class of former fighter and benefit from this status. However, in a number of cases, the same individuals had been tortured, kidnapped and forced to fight, and may also have been forced to find shelter in a neighbouring country. To solve this categorisation problem, this thesis uses the qualitative methodology to analyse individuals from the point of view of how they perceive themselves – that is, their self-identification. The following paragraphs consider the most relevant theories on the reintegration process in Liberia and its connection with identity. Through this method, the study aims to assess how far certain psycho-social factors impact on the marginalisation of former soldiers, attempting to evaluate their claims within the context of the wider literature and provide conclusive evidence (if possible) to support certain claims made by scholars on the subject.

2.3.1 The former fighters' "web of connections"

It is clear at this stage that central to this thesis is the relationship between the categories of civilians and ex-combatants. We have seen in the paragraph above how many scholars found it difficult to divide these two categories due to the inability of some individuals to prove their status of fighters, or because of the decision of some others not to enrol in the DDR programmes, or even the struggle to separate victims from perpetrators. Consequently there is an objective complexity in evaluating their relationships.

To facilitate this task I decided to take into consideration three essential variables: status, networks and identity. Together these three form what I identify as the web of connections of the former fighters. Their association permits the analysis of the relationship between the category of ex-combatants and the rest of the population. Analysing the "status" of the members of the category of ex-combatants allows evaluation of their social position with respect to the category of civilians. In the hierarchical ladder of a society this category can be above or below the other. The problematic status of the former fighters has often hindered the reintegration process producing in some cases marginalisation. In fact,

“...to a certain extent, marginalisation is a shifting phenomenon, linked to social status. So, for example, individuals or groups might enjoy high social status at one point in time, but as social change takes place, so they lose this status and become marginalised. Similarly, as life cycle stages change, so might people’s marginalised position. (Kagan and Burton 2010: 314)

Analysing the “networks” around members of the category of former fighters allows the extent of their interaction with civilians to be measured. In some cases the former fighters gathered together after the war, creating new networks. The networks produced by this process are mostly the result of exclusion and therefore reflect the failure of the reintegration process.

The analysis of the concepts of status and networks does not require the review of many theories, and empirical observation of the phenomenon is sufficient. On the other hand, a theoretical background must be built around the concept of identity. Assessing “identity” among the category of former fighters serves to calculate either the intensity of the bonds of the ex-combatants with their peers or the limits of their recognition as civilians. Most of the works focusing on conflict in Africa and particularly in Liberia focus on analysing groups based on identity issues such as social age or ethnicity.

According to several authors (Young 2002; Clough 1992; Adebayo 1998), African society found itself in a state of crisis and disorder at the end of the Cold War. 1989 marked the start of a gradual reduction of interest in African affairs by the superpowers as well as the rest of the international community, and the African countries’ international strategic role was diminished (Adebajo and Landsberg 2000). Furthermore, that year coincided with the collapse of state institutions in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Congo (DRC). Fierce competition over scarce natural resources (e.g. diamonds in Sierra Leone) led to conflict and warfare between different ethnic groups or militias, which caused instability both within each country and in neighbouring countries as well. Since 1989, the majority of conflicts in Africa have been domestic (Richards 2005), a fact that has raised the level of difficulty of coping with and resolving such disputes, as they have proved to be more intense, more violent and more complicated than inter-state conflicts. Analysing these intra-state conflicts, we can deduce the implied strength of certain collective identities such as religion, ethnicity or age. The nature of most of the conflicts involves identity

clashes and in-group/out-group discrimination. It seems that in general African conflicts are more often mobilised along lines of “identity” than of social class. This is because religious, ethnic and social age identities are used by warring factions and social movements to fuel the conflicts, based on shared beliefs, values and perceptions.

Crawford Young (2002) discusses the role of collective identity, whether ethnic, racial or religious, and if it can help to restore order in Africa. Even though religion, race or ethnicity may not be the main contributors to conflict, it is not unusual to see war and violence in areas where multiple differences prevail within a social context and where there is an underlying clash of cultures, beliefs or values (for a more detailed discussion, see Deng 1995). If we develop our understanding of African history and state conflict and of the patterns of rationality in violence that appears to be simply atavistic, we may come closer to resolving conflicts and understanding the causal mechanisms of violence.

Taking this into consideration and analysing it from the point of view of my work, it is not just typical collective identities such as those of religion, race, age or ethnicity that can be used to help resolve hostilities or prevent new ones. Some new collective identities established after the end of conflict, such as those of former fighters or refugees, can also contribute to the restoration of order. According to Coy and Woehrle (2000) it is possible to solve identity-based conflicts by constructing inclusive identities and establishing a mechanism of identity transformation through a positive identity shift. Furthermore, unresolved issues lingering in these new groups can also lead to the outbreak of new hostilities and violence and this needs to be addressed in a similar way.

When analysing antagonist collective identities it is also relevant to address cultural pluralism. In Africa, according to Young (2002), the presence of conflict is related more to the general discontent of people in a troubled state and the resources available for conflict to thrive in these conditions, than to multiple cultures. The idea that the presence of multiple groups can lead to conflict because of in-group/out-group discrimination is wrong. Cultural pluralism in itself has nothing to do with conflict, since countries where conflict does not exist are often as diverse as those where conflict is prevalent. Liberia represents an example of this:

The Liberian civil war of 1989 to 1990 was characterized by brutal, ethnic

conflict. However, the subsequent civil wars of 1992 to 1993 and 1994 to 1996 were defined by factional affiliation that was increasingly independent of ethnic identity. (Young 2008: abstract)

Also, while the Liberian war cannot be attributed to the clash of opposing ethnic identities, identity can still be considered as a strong component in the hostilities. Bøas and Hatløy (2008) propose viewing the Liberian fighting as “first and foremost a ‘war’ about identity; over the question of what it means to be a Liberian, and how the polity of the country should be constituted and resources distributed” (Bøas and Hatløy 2008: 45). This follows and develops the idea formulated in Bøas’ 2005 study. As mentioned in chapter 1, their study is based on a model survey and analyses the war itself, so is quite unlike my thesis, but it does introduce the concept of identity in Liberia and how it affected the stability of the country. My work differs from this since is not particularly concerned with the Liberian conflict itself, but analyses the transformation that occurred among the former fighters after the end of it. Nevertheless, this work has been useful in my research as a point of departure for analysing the reintegration process as part of a path in the transformation of identity.

According to the two researchers, their approach to the Liberian conflict differed from that of other academics, being primarily identity-related (and thus similar to my approach). They do, however, stress that there are many different ways to analyse the relation of identity to the Liberian civil war (Bøas and Hatløy 2008), including Utas’ (2003) youth perspective; the religious dimension and the role of the secret societies as elites (Ellis 1999), and Kaldor’s (2001) view of the Liberian conflict as a primary example of a new kind of war.

While Bøas and Hatløy (2008) relate identity to the war, and suggest how this issue should be examined and used as a useful tool for the purpose of reconstruction, my study is aimed instead at researching how the end of the war affected the former fighters’ identity transformation, resulting in their inclusion or exclusion. Bøas and Hatløy assert that “the task for the various stakeholders currently involved in Liberia is not simply putting Liberia back together again, but, for the first time, constructing a state and a polity” (Bøas and Hatløy 2008: 37). This leads to a major concept – that it is imperative for the DDR programme to focus more on social cohesion and security rather than on simple skills transmission. This mirrors the challenge facing individual former fighters as they attempt to re-order their lives after the war.

On the same lines, Hazen (2007) discusses the social disintegration and integration process during and after war, introducing the idea that war not only fragments the social community but also integrates various members of the community into a new social fabric. Hazen defines social, economic and political disintegration as “the breaking of community bonds between individuals and the disassociation of the individual from community beliefs, norms, laws, structures and goals” (Hazen 2007: 2).

According to Hazen, if society in general has disintegrated and the previous social norms have changed as a result of war, the reintegration process involves trying to include the former fighters in a society that is itself in a state of recovery. However, to fully comprehend this reintegration process, it is essential to understand the whole development of the society from the beginning. It is in fact necessary to analyse, since the start of the conflict, the process of “integration into the war family, disintegration of the war family, and reintegration into society” (Hazen 2007: 5). To fully reintegrate the soldiers, it is necessary to identify patterns of disintegration and integration during the war. It is important to ensure, when reconstructing society, that the conditions that led to the war are not rebuilt.

Chapter 2 reconstructs the process of debonding the former fighters from their previous networks and society, and the consequent state of confusion. It is then necessary to understand the identity with which the former fighters associate, or which they are “labelled with”, in the transition from war to peace. This means dealing with more than the simple reintegration of the former fighters; it requires an effort to reconstruct the social bonds of the entire society. Hazen refers to social integration and reconstruction of these bonds not only in positive ways but also as involving the risk of creating “competing group identities” (Hazen 2007: 1). She defines, in fact, a clear division between combatants and non-combatants, as two different and opposite groups. From this division arise alienation, stigmatisation, polarity and marginalisation of the combatant; in this way, the “us versus them” mentality develops. In my work, this clear division between the two groups and the mentality of “us versus them” is more centralised around the concept of identity transformation and its outcomes.

2.3.2 *Inter-group behaviour*

The paragraphs above give a clear idea of how identity is central to the debate on conflict. However I chose identity as one of the three variables to understand the developing relationships between the categories of ex-combatants and civilians. How does identity fit in the discourse?

The link between identity and categories is very close. I mention above that identity in the web of connections is the measure for calculating either the intensity of the bonds of the ex-combatants with their peers or the limits to their recognition as civilians. We now need a tool that enables us to quantify the strength of the ties that link ex-combatants between them and separates them from the civilians. This tool is the Social Identity Theory (SIT) originally formulated by Tajfel and Turner (1979; 1986). SIT approaches the concept of identity from the point of view of inter-group behaviour and has frequently been used to explain concepts such as group, category, self-identification and discrimination. It is an excellent instrument for recognising the group identity of former fighters as a reason for their exclusion from social life, which is an essential part of the marginalisation process.

From the SIT point of view the former fighters are seen in this thesis as members of a group. They are not categorised by economic, cultural or educational factors but by the self-categorisation of group members. The identification of the former fighters with a particular group occurs through the process of collective self-identification that derives from similar behaviour or circumstances (Jenkins 1996: 103). More recently, sociologists have been exploring not how the “self” is identified through interpersonal relations but how it can help identify “the other”. This idea is part of the social identity discourse elaborated by several authors (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner *et al.* 1987) to express how the similar characteristics of “the selves” shared by individuals are used to characterise a group. SIT mostly focuses on the distinguishing features associated with this group membership (Tajfel 1981; Turner 1982). Social identity is “that part of an individual’s self concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to the membership” (Tajfel 1981: 255). This approach explains some of the dynamics and mechanisms of interaction between the members of the group as well as their interaction with members of other groups. In other words,

this assumption helps to understand the categorisation as members of the group of fighters during and after the war.

This theory was originally designed for analysing inter-group behaviour and especially inter-group discrimination. This part of the theory also helps to explain the gap between citizens and former fighters. A further development in this theory asserts that the perceived group membership leads to self-categorisation. Hogg and Williams (2000: 83) say that “the categorization of stimuli produces a perceptual accentuation effect in which intra-category similarities among stimuli and inter-category difference among stimuli are accentuated on dimensions believed to be correlated with the categorization”. As stated above, this categorisation is not only derived from the role played during the war by certain individuals but also from others’ perception of the individual himself. If others identify an individual with a particular group, this automatically legitimises the collective self of that person. The identification of the individual by the community as a former fighter legitimises the person to self-categorise himself into that group. Self-categorisation as a soldier during the war and as a former fighter after the end of the conflict is an expression of the collective self. For instance, this classification derives from the concept of in-group/out-group as differences between the groups.

Taking into consideration the process of self-categorisation into groups in SIT is in fact the best way to analyse the differentiation between the former fighters and civilians, and even more the mechanism of inclusion or exclusion by the community. During the self-categorisation process, individuals compare themselves to others, and those who are perceived as similar are considered the in-group, while those who are seen as different are seen as the out-group (Leary and Tangney 2003: 145). Self-identification with a group is recognition of oneself as a member of the group and it affects personal identity (Turner *et al.* 1987). This process of identification is applied in this thesis to see how the former fighters define themselves in terms of commonalities with others associating themselves with a group. It is through the process of self-categorisation that the development of the identity formation (Stets and Burke 2000: 224) or transformation occurs.

SIT helps to understand the exclusion of the ex-combatants from society and the in-group/out-group mechanism through self-categorisation. Generally the support is shared between the in-group members rather than out-group members. “According

to social identity theory, when individuals take on a group-based identity, there is uniformity of perception and action among group members (Haslam, *et al.* 1996; Oakes, Haslam and Turner 1994)” (Leary and Tangney 2003: 145).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter presents a navigation through the relevant theories that frame my work. All the assumptions and problems to be addressed by my research revolve around the relationships between the categories of ex-combatants and civilians. The first impression during my fieldwork was of a “controversial” rapport between these two categories that in some cases recalled the spectre of marginalisation. I decided then to review some of the major ideas on marginalisation in Liberia linked to particular categories. Once I detected that marginalisation was among the causes of the conflict in Liberia I looked at the mechanism of the international community to unravel the source of this hostility: the reintegration process. A reintegration process can have two possible results: success or failure. A successful reintegration brings an end to the marginalisation of those who took up weapons and started the conflict in the first place. To measure this result I decided to take into consideration three variables linked to the ex-combatants, called the web of connections. Between these variables identity required a particular level of attention, with a review of some of the theories in the field. In particular I found, in the in-group/out-group mechanism, the tool to measure the intensity of the identification of the former fighters between peers.

Before moving to the next chapter and starting to analyse the data collected during the fieldwork, there are two more points to address. First of all I need to explain further the connection between the category of youth and that of the ex-combatants. Secondly I have to identify the theoretical question of the research.

2.4.1 *Youth marginalisation theories as a theoretical framework of the thesis: from youth to fighters*

In recent years the topic of youth marginalisation from political and social roles in Africa has been extensively approached from many angles by several scholars. According to de Boeck and Honwana (2005), even if often “out of place” and with a lack of self-realisation, youth have managed to create identities and to be noticed – as

seen in their participation in conflicts in many African states. In the paragraph above we have seen how the marginalisation of youngsters has been the triggering point for violent conflicts. This work assumes those theses as the relevant basis representing the starting point for my research. Refusing to accept ethnicity and warlordism/factionalism as main causes for the conflict, we have seen how the strong marginalisation of the youth has without doubt been one of the main reasons for the war in Liberia. But what happened to the marginalisation of the youngsters after the end of the war? Did the marginalisation end, or was it accentuated after the reintegration process? What is the relationship between the category of “youth” and the ex-combatants? While I will address the first two questions in the following chapters, we need now to rationalise the last question.

First of all, youth must be considered as a social category. While recently formed, the category of youth possesses

...its multiple subcultures expressed in terms of dress, music, specific modes of violence, and the emergence of a new co-operative units such as gangs and ‘ecuries’ which have replaced more traditional kind-based ethnic and multigenerational associations. (de Boeck and Honwana 2005: 6)

What happened to this category with the outbreak of hostilities? In accordance with the theories that portray the youngsters’ marginalisation as the cause of the conflict, the outbreak of the war transformed them from youth to fighters. From this moment on the category of “former youth” will be identified in the research as “fighters”. The next chapter will fill the gap about the transformation from “former youth” (the fighters) to ex-combatants.

2.4.2 Theoretical question

After assembling all the pieces of the puzzle in the first two chapters, we are ready to review the research problem formulated in Chapter 1 (How did the relationship between civilians and ex-combatants influence the success or failure of the reintegration process?). We have now all the missing information about history, methodology and theoretical framework. If we consider the relationship between civilians and ex-combatants as the starting point of this research, the central part of the debate is obviously the complete success of the reintegration process to end the marginalisation process. From the analysis of history it is clear that discrimination and

marginalisation are part of the Liberian environment. While we agreed that marginalisation based on social age represented the causes of the conflict, how did it evolve after the call for peace? Therefore, what happened to the group of armed mobilised youth after the war? At first glance it looked like they became ex-combatants, but did they influence the change? Through personal observation I noticed that some of the former fighters were being treated with inequity after the end of the war, generating a feeling of discrimination. I also started to recognise behaviour typical of marginalisation. In addition, if marginalisation appeared to be common for various vulnerable groups (internally displaced, refugees, women, etc.), it appeared that it was accentuated for ex-combatants. Was not the aim of the reintegration process to reinsert the former fighters into the community? Accordingly, in developing the research problem a theoretical question arises: Can the failure of reintegration of ex-combatants generate a further step in the evolution of the marginalisation process already present in Liberia? It is the purpose of this thesis to address this question in the following chapters.

Chapter 3: Disarmament and demobilisation – triggering the transformation of the former fighters’ web of connections

3.1 Introduction

During the Disarmament and Demobilisation I changed my name. My real name is Michael K. N. Dan. Dan is my father’s name, Michael is my first name, K is my middle name and N is also my middle name. Kadafi [he introduced himself as Kadafi] is my fighting name, that’s the name I have on my ex-comb. ID card. Everybody knows me as Kadafi. One thing international community has known is that ex-comb. are not someone who are born to become ex-comb. They were not born to become a bad person and it’s all because of disadvantages in this country caused them to join the army and the rebel. But after the war now we need to learn. As for me, I am very good in school, I have my certificate, I want to do medical science, after that I want to become a lawyer. I want to go to a good institution, whether here or abroad and get my certificate. (Kadafi 2005, pers. comm., 27 November)

Kadafi is a 29-year-old former fighter from Grand Kru who fought with the government troops. He joined the army after the rebels killed his family, and soon after went to fight in Nimba County against the “rebels”. Kadafi was one of my most reliable informants, who contributed much of the information collected during my visits to Liberia. In this passage he expresses how former fighters had once been normal people who passed through a transition phase, after which they wished to return to their normal lives. This began with the Disarmament and Demobilisation process (DD), and happened simultaneously with the changes in Liberian society. The transformation of the wartime Liberian society to a state of peace involved a complete change of an individual’s personality, behaviour and relationships.

This chapter describes in detail the elements that constitute this social transformation of Liberian citizens and specifically of former fighters after the end of the conflict. In particular this chapter monitors the transformation of the three variables forming the web of connections: status, networks and identity. The first significant post-conflict event that brought notable change to the situation in Liberia

was the establishment of UNMIL in October 2003. The component of the peacekeeping operation dealing directly with former fighters was the DDR programme. The DD phase was the first external intervention in Liberia that to affect the lives of former fighters.

As stated in Chapter 1, the DD programme commenced in December 2003, following the August 2003 declaration of the CPA, contributing to the speedy implementation of DDR. This phase started badly due to insufficient protection of the lone cantonment location, where disarmament had not been completed, and to the rushed organisation of the process, which failed to take fully into account the actual situation on the ground. In addition, the DDR lacked the approval of a number of the primary partners, while poor communications meant that former fighters were not sure what to expect from the disarmament process. Immediately after hostile outbreaks that led to fatalities in the cantonment and beyond, this first period of the DD was halted. It did not operate fully again until April 2004, following the restoration of security (Jennings 2008) and the construction of adequate cantonments. By the conclusion of the DD segments, around 103,000 participants had been catalogued as neutralised, as opposed to the estimated numbers of 38,000–45,000 former fighters (UNDP 2006). However, only about 27,800 weapons and six million rounds of ammunition were stockpiled. Furthermore, the haste of the operation illustrates how quick and abrupt this process was, generating unexpected reactions from the former fighters and causing much internal and external confusion.

3.2 Internal and external factors triggering the identity transformation process

The establishment of the DD phase signalled the beginning of a period of transition for Liberian society that was supposed to lead the country from war to a peaceful environment. But such a transition implies a variety of changes and transformations, not only at a political, societal and organisational level but also on a personal level. DDR is a process that entails not only social and material but also psychological elements (Motumi and McKenzie 1998: 183). The first people to be affected by the changes that came about with the DD were the former fighters. The following is a description of how the DD process affected the role of those who had taken part in the war, taking them from the status of “fighter” to that of “former fighter”. The implementation of the peacekeeping operation generated in former

fighters a series of psycho-social transformations that affected the whole sphere of their web of connections.

3.2.1 The meaning of the status of “fighter” and the support of war networks during the conflict

A step back in time is needed to outline the meaning of being a fighter in Liberia during the war. Joining the factions at a certain point of the conflict meant the difference between life and death. A need for a better position in society was the main reason for youth joining the conflict (relevant background is cited in Chapter 2). From an analysis of my interviews, it is clear that this new position would include access to food, shelter, clothing and, more importantly, a supportive network – a new family or community that could look after people and give them status.

Status, in general, indicates a combination of measurable factors that relate an individual to others. It is the fusion of social and economic factors that determine the rank the subject holds in society. The higher the position in the social order, the more privileges and opportunities the holder has. To determine the status of a person in modern society, three variables must be considered: income, education and occupation (Lindemann 2007). During the 14 years of civil war in Liberia, it was impossible to consider these variables to determine someone’s status. The variables became important only after the end of the conflict; during the conflict the main attributes determining status were the degree of power a person exercised and the level of security they had access to. Both attributes could be found in the role of fighter.

The first variable that conferred strong status during the war was the power a person exercised. The relationship between status and power was fundamental to the hierarchy of wartime society. Power legitimated status and vice versa, “giving high status and high power an effect on private acceptance of justifications that power lacked without status” (Massey, Freeman and Zelditch 1997: 238). This was also the case in Liberia. Utas (2003: 53), in discussing status, defines the participation of Liberian youth in the civil war as a move towards power and influence, while the peace that began with the first demobilisation in 1997 led to an immediate loss of influence. Indeed, some of the youths used the role of being a soldier as a way to gain

importance in society. Wartime societies allowed young men to become strong figures in society through military bravery and success (Utas 2003: 115). This analysis emphasises how the only way to gain a strong position in wartime society was to play a direct part in the fighting.

In many cases, power that involved authority represented the possibility to force someone to do something he or she would not otherwise do, even if this potential power was not applied. For many of the soldiers, power symbolised control over the life or death of the non-combatant. “Perceptions of power and expectations of its use can be functional equivalents of actual use” (Massey, Freeman and Zelditch 1997: 246). In line with this argument, I assume that, during the war, the legitimacy of power depended on the status of the fighters and, at the same time, that status tended to legitimate power.

One of the ways to exercise power over others was the use of fear. Instilling fear and demonstrating power were instruments for maintaining control and gave the combatants an important position in wartime society. In other words, the maintenance of fear as a coercive tool was the source of the power.

“When we capture you we will slaughter you, make gate with you so people can be afraid” (Patrick 2009, pers. comm., 3 August). (The term “make gate” is explained below.) Patrick, aged 30 and from Monrovia, was a member of the government forces and in 2001 was sent to Lofa to fight the rebels coming from Guinea and Sierra Leone. He disclosed during the interview that throughout the fighting one of the essential factors for survival was the demonstration of power through instilling fear. It was common in Liberia during the war to establish checkpoints in order to control the movement of people and goods from one place to another. Many factions were controlling different areas of the country and, to keep control of the people going into or out of the area, there was a need for checkpoints, which were nicknamed “gates”. The fighters sometimes displayed on the “gates” the body parts or dead bodies of people who had been brutally tortured, mainly to increase fear and show that the soldiers’ power over life and death was the only law at that time. In his interview Patrick said: “We take off their heads, their hearts, if your fellow rebel comes and see you, they’ll be scared because they know how we do when we catch you” (Patrick 2009, pers. comm., Monrovia 3 August).

Power is essential for status in any environment, whether peaceful or wartime. The difference arises in where it has its source and the way it is exercised. In the case of Liberia, the power of the fighters was what French and Raven (1959) define as coercive power. This kind of power is based on the fear of having something withheld, which assures the submission of others. That “something” in Liberia was freedom or, in extreme cases, life. This kind of power left resentment and resistance as a legacy for the future, and affected the fighters during their reintegration.

The second attribute that determined status during the Liberian war was access to security. As Bøas and Hatløy (2008) argue, a need for security was the main reason for joining the forces. According to my research, security is not just a matter of personal or communal safety but also of access to basic goods for survival.

Before the first war I was in the village, I was in school when the rebels entered the town and grabbed my brother and they told him to push their car. As he was struggling to push the car they killed him. After that they came to my people and now my mother is not alive nor my father. After that they came after my people, running behind us, and I decided to join the common forces [government troops]. (Kadafi 2005, pers. comm., 27 November)

Kadafi fought in the northern part of Liberia for most of the conflict. His words evoke the unstable and unpredictable security situation during the war. Bøas and Hatløy (2008: 45), in their survey, found that 82% of people began fighting in order to provide for their own, their families’ and their community’s security. According to the authors:

Their original reason for “getting in” was neither very political, nor overwhelmingly based on a desire for personal enrichment or due to idleness, but in order to improve their security situation. Their motivation for fighting may of course have changed as the war continued, but this seems to be the initial reason for “getting in”. (Bøas and Hatløy 2008: 49)

This raises two issues that need to be considered: first, in order to provide security for himself and for his family, an individual had to join one of the factions; secondly, after the choice had been made, motivations for continuing with the armed forces may have changed.

Analysing the issue of security from the perspective of status, it is easy to deduce that, in general, the only way to remain safe and to protect one’s family during

the period of the hostilities was to acquire the status of soldier. “A characteristic of the Liberian civil war has been that civilians suffer the most, and are killed in far greater numbers than combatants” (HRW 1995: no page).

According to John, the only way to survive was to follow the combatants, becoming a soldier. “I can say they forced me to join because when the freedom fighters entered our town, they said we must follow them. The person who say no, they will shoot them [him]” (John 2009, pers. comm., 19 May). For the purpose of this thesis, it does not matter whether the decision to join the fighting was spontaneous or forced; what is important is the effect produced by the decision. Life must be considered as the most important asset which, in some cases during the war, could only be protected by acquiring the status of fighter. John is a 29-year-old former fighter from Pleebo in Maryland County. He fought for NPFL but is now selling fish at the local market in West Point, trying to save money to buy a motorbike to operate as a taxi driver.

When it comes to acquiring basic assets or goods, we need to acknowledge that in Liberia, as in many countries devastated by conflict, the war modified the normal social order. The scattered nature of the Liberian war, with all its warring factions and instabilities, changed an economy-based society into a survival society, deprived of basic goods and services. In most cases the only way to have access to the basic means of subsistence was to join one of the factions. As recalled by one former fighter: “I join them by myself. Because when they entered Bomi, there was no food, so I used to work for them buying cigarettes, then they gave me food” (Little John 2005, pers. comm., 17 December).

Little John was a former child soldier from Bomi County who moved to Monrovia to live with his aunt after the war. She provided him with food and accommodation. He joined LURD in 2003 when just 16 because they provided him with security.

It is generally recognised that the highest positions in a wartime society are held by those in the military class, who have access to basic commodities such as food, shelter, clothing and limited medical facilities. The chaos generated by the lack of a legitimate power prevents society from functioning normally. While in normal circumstances income determines the variables for measuring and defining status, during the war the variables for this evaluation are related to the level of subsistence.

In a war such as that in Liberia, where most of the population was displaced or became refugees, elements such as income, education and employment, which are used in peaceful societies to identify status, gave way to other variables such as access to basic commodities. These factors are vividly recalled and expressed in numerous interviews with former fighters. A former fighter explains that “LURD made food cheap across the bridge so, for this reason, people [civilians] left from all over to come here for food. We broke fighter foot for harassing people for their food” (Chief Papa 2005, pers. comm., 27 October). To describe the precariousness of the situation Patrick, another former fighter, said:

They said they would pay you when you get there, you get no other way to come because you’re in the middle of the rebels. Then when they put you down you would be fighting with either your leg cut or you’ve full wound before you come to Monrovia so you’ll bleed there and fight till you die, no pay, but there would be food but then and the rebels come and fight us and take our food. Then we would follow them and kill some of them and take our food. Like rice, oil, cassava. All the money, the food, cigarettes, drinks.
(Patrick 2009, pers. comm., Monrovia 3 August)

This account illustrates how important some goods were for basic survival, even for the warring factions.

Power and security were sometimes reasons for joining the forces, but they were certainly a reason for every fighter remaining with the factions. One result of becoming a member of the armed forces was the achievement of a particular status. This had several advantages. In some cases status meant that some marginalised groups could be more active and participate more in society – for example, young people (Richards 1995, 2005; Utas 2003, 2008). In the case of the Great Lakes region, for instance, youths were willing to join the militia because that was the only way to obtain social reintegration and status since they were excluded from any political, economic and educational participation (Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot 2003: 34). The same is true in the case of Liberia.

Many of the individuals who enrolled with the warring factions in Liberia came to enjoy their status. The initial motivation for joining the forces evolved into the desire for a better position, as the status of fighter had been too prestigious for someone to return willingly to being “a nobody”. As Hazen (2007: 4) writes:

Combatants come to see themselves as part of a new social unit, one that accepts them as soldiers, gives them an important title, such as general, gives them social status and a voice, and provides them with the means to earn a living. The idea of leaving this familiar setting is both threatening and scary to combatants, even those who would prefer to stop fighting, because the “war family” is seen as a source of security.

In a war environment – such as that in Liberia from 1989 until 2003 – the status of fighter was among the highest in the social structure. The instability of the failed state and the martial environment established by the military meant that power and security were the main priorities of Liberians. Those who had attained these basic needs could be considered to possess a high status in society.

A direct consequence of joining the warring factions was the development of specific relationships with comrades. The interlacing of these relationships produced a series of support networks that operated at different levels and with different intensity. A general definition of a social network is as a social structure made up of individuals connected by one or more specific types of interdependency. Depending on the strength and nature of the ties, the network may be simple or complex. In the case of former fighters, their social networks were very complex, affecting their lives on many levels. This occurred especially during the war, when there was constant pressure from leaders to detach the soldiers from their previous bonds with family and community in order to build stronger ties with their commanders. Hazen claims:

Faction leaders reinforce the feelings of alienation by often reminding the perpetrator that he can no longer return home because he will no longer be accepted after the egregious acts he committed. This severs all social ties between the combatant and his community. (Hazen 2007: 3)

The longer the period serving in the faction, the greater the distance from the previous networks such as family, friends and community. This distancing from previous relationships made the fighters develop stronger bonds with their comrades in arms, decreasing the chances of their full reintegration after the conflict.

In the case of former fighters in Ethiopia,
the informal networks with family, relatives and community members [were]
still intact at the time of their arrival. The shorter the duration of service and

the younger an ex-combatant on demobilization, the less difficult this process was perceived. (Colletta, Kostner and Wiederhofer 1996: 78)

The case of Liberia was totally different since the two civil wars together lasted for more than 14 years. The long period and the young age of the participants – the average age of demobilised soldiers was 25.3 years (NCDDRR 2004: 3) – made the soldiers' ties with their brothers in arms as strong as those of a family: a war family. This process of incorporation of individuals into war families is not just a matter of indoctrination but also provides the soldier with a support network that can supply him with all his needs (Hazen 2007: 5).

However, the status and the networks of the former fighter would change with the signing of the peace agreement – leading to a complete overturning of his life.

3.2.2 External factors: disarmament and demobilisation and their effects on the status and networks of the fighters

The initial action of the international community for recreating stability in Liberia after the ceasefire was the implementation of the DDR. The DDR “is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civil status” (GA 2005: 8). This declaration is the foundation on which all DDR programmes around the world are built. The main aim of the first phase of the process in Liberia was to disarm and demobilise the warring factions and consequently the soldiers, in order to take control of the peace process. This mechanism was not designed only for pragmatic reasons but also to affect the fighters psychologically. The full DD process represents a threat for the combatants and provokes internal reactions such as anxiety, fear and insecurity. This occurs because the DD mechanism de-structures the social networks that the fighters relied on for a long period of their lives (Hazen 2007: 4). To reintegrate former fighters back into Liberian society, the DDR had to break the bonds with the past and especially with the war family, with the aim of encouraging the ex-soldiers to choose a new position in the community. However, breaking with the past essentially meant breaking with previous networks and also changing status.

The first attempt to reintegrate former fighters in Liberia occurred with the end of the first civil war when a first DD process took place. At that time there was already a taste of how this mechanism could affect the status of fighter. Utas (2003:

53) writes: “The peace proceeding from late 1996 up to the elections of July 1997 had reduced [the ex-combatants’] status from masters to subjects, returning them back to the lowly social position they experienced at the onset of the war”. This modification of the role of the fighter occurred because the transition to a peaceful society modified the variables for the establishment of high social status. As stated above, power and security were the two attributes that conferred a high position on fighters in wartime society but, with the reestablishment of a civilian society, the variables reverted to normal standards. Economic and political power replaced coercive power, while security was enforced by the peacekeeping operation, which granted access to safety and goods for everyone.

One of the main factors affected by these changes was the soldiers’ previous, almost exclusive access to basic goods. According to Utas, some former fighters after the first civil war had hoped for a new outbreak of hostilities so “food commodities and respect would return to them, as they again picked up their guns and became masters of at least a fragment of the Liberian society” (Utas 2003: 54). During the conflict the war economies, looting and exchange of stolen goods were acceptable means to sustain the factions. In a period of peace, combatants cannot carry out these activities because they are forbidden and punished (Hazen 2007: 6).

This transition from a period of war anarchy, when looting and stealing was the rule, to a period of law enforcement occurred very quickly. The exact moment of change was not recognised upon the signing of the peace agreement, as many previous agreements had not been respected (see Chapter 1). But with the opening of the DD camps, the fighters realised that they were losing the power and influence they had once had.

Disarmament is understood to be the “collection, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants” (DPKO 2000: 15). It entails a change in position from “combatant” to “ex-combatant”, identified as “soldiers no longer serving in formal military or paramilitary structures, or ... [participating] in militia or guerrilla activities” (Muggah 2004: 32). A crucial element of the Liberian experience was the reduction of entry requirements during the December 2003–April 2004 hiatus; initially requiring production of a weapon, the recommenced DD process only required applicants to produce 150 rounds of ammunition.

Weapons are central to the definition and characterisation of the disarmament process. They are the means used to exercise coercive power during conflicts, conferring on their possessor the status and attributes of fighter. The DDR manual of the United Nations supports this, linking the status of the fighter to weapons: “Any entrant who is unable to surrender any weapon or ammunition and is unable to prove combatant status should not be accepted for demobilization and reintegration” (DPKO 2000: 51). The status of combatant is therefore directly linked to the weapon. The gun symbolises the prospect of maintaining an elevated position in society. With the opening of the cantonments, to which access depended on the submission of a weapon, the Liberian social order was completely inverted. The moment of surrendering a weapon represented the sudden termination of the status of combatant and the sudden removal of privileged positions for more than 100,000 people.

Hazen (2007: 6) presents the handing-in of the weapon as a choice comparable to a leap in the dark, with little chance to regain what will be lost:

In war, ex-combatants believe they can control their actions and their choices. They are the ones in charge. They are the ones who have a voice and can generate change. Such sentiments are especially strong in countries that do not provide such widespread opportunities for political and economic involvement during peacetime. Thus, to choose to give up one’s weapon, also involves the choice to lose this sense of purpose, prestige and control with little guarantee that it can be regained in civilian life.

For the former fighter Love, however, handing in her weapon was almost a relief, a symbol of the end of her duties and of her return to her family: “Yes, when the UN was giving money for guns, I gave my gun. When I gave my gun I left and came home” (Love 2009, pers. comm., 9 May). Love is one of the multitude of soldiers who were longing for the moment when they could finally leave the past behind. Aged 26 and originally from a small village in Klay, Bomi County, she admitted without shame: “I have not attended school before the war and also after the war” (Love 2009, pers. comm., 9 May). Her comment, however, indicates that she was not one of the “lumpen” youth. After the war, Love joined her family and now lives in St Paul Bridge where she sells “cook bowl” for a living. She freely joined the LURD forces in 2003, as she says in the interview: “No, I was not forced but the disadvantage was too much from the government troops” (Love 2009, pers. comm., 9

May). But even if she joined the factions freely, she clearly expressed her relief at handing over her gun. She added that when she went home her family did not show any problems in accepting her. For this reason she had decided not to participate in the reintegration programmes. When asked if she was taking part in any of the courses for former fighters, she answered: “No, because after I gave my gun, I was finished with war business” (Love 2009, pers. comm., 9 May). For Love, the return of the weapon was the end of “war business”, the end of everything related to the conflict and the status of fighter.

Dell is a 23-year-old male from Kakata City, Margibi County, who fought with the government troops in the 2003 war. Just like Love, he decided not to go through the RR process. After he handed over his weapon he disappeared into the mass of Liberians. He said: “After I gave my gun for the money, I came to Red Light [an area in Monrovia]” (Dell 2009, pers. comm., 18 May).

These two interviews exemplify many others, where the interviewee had felt the weight of being a soldier. With the status of fighter had also come the responsibilities of this position. The abdication of the status of fighter represented by the handing-over of a gun was a crucial step for every soldier. For some it was a free choice, while for others it was enforced; but for all it symbolised a break with the past and all its consequences. This fracture represented more than a shift in status; it amounted to a conversion experience, after which a new primary – and unknown – position in society had to be acquired.

After the disarmament process and the consequent dissolution of the status of fighter came the demobilisation programme. This process was chronologically the second external intervention that influenced the lives of former fighters after the end of the conflict. Demobilisation signifies the “process by which armed forces . . . either downsize or completely disband” (DPKO 2000: 15); the former fighters are transferred to their site of preference. The demobilisation of soldiers has been universally designed for delinking combatants from their military organisation, as “Demobilization is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups” (UN 2006: 2). In the general literature on Liberia, little attention and relevance has been given to this social process. The transformation of the social actors and structures stimulated by demobilisation deeply affected Liberian society, with negative consequences for the reintegration process.

One of the aims of the DDR mechanism is to help secure a country by trying to avoid former fighters being left without livelihoods or support networks (UN 2006: 2). In some cases the demobilisation itself can be counterproductive to this objective, especially in cases where the only support networks of the former fighters are the wartime networks. This was the case in Liberia, where in most cases the only relationships existing for the fighters were part of their wartime networks. In these instances, delinking the fighters from their social networks obviously affected their whole sphere of networks. “When a programme seeks to separate ex-combatants from their factions, success in breaking any individual’s ties to the network may undermine the network as a whole” (Humphreys and Weinstein 2005: 26).

Taking a completely different approach, it can be asserted that the existence of networks between former fighters after the conflict increased the opportunities for economic and psychological benefits and reconciliation (Humphreys and Weinstein 2005: 6). Of the same opinion are Colletta, Kostner and Wiederhofer (1996: 12) who report that in Ethiopia:

...[m]ost ex-combatants participate in informal social networks. They meet their former comrades and opponents at least occasionally to discuss their present life, work opportunities, income-generating projects and the general economic and political situation. Such informal contacts have proved helpful in facilitating their transition to civilian life. In fact, over one third of ex-combatants cooperate in ventures. Informal contacts also help them to cope with the challenge of civilian life better.

With this in mind, in the last part of their work on lessons learned, Colletta, Kostner and Wiederhofer (1996: 119) recommend as general policy for all post-conflict developments that such economic and social networks should be facilitated in order to promote the reintegration of former fighters.

Undoubtedly, most fighters had to leave their own land, families and communities to fight in unfamiliar environments, some for military reasons and others for simple survival. The dynamics of this situation caused the fighters to become estranged from their families and communities. In some cases this separation occurred due to traumatic events such as forced conscription, but in other cases it was just the normal cycle of events. These rapid changes affected not only the fighters, but also every member of the community. Even those who had not left their communities to go

and fight were forced to change their routines and behaviour as a result of the war. Some of them were even forced by their own communities to leave, in order to have a greater chance of survival. One interviewee, Kamara, a 38-year-old former fighter from Lofa who fought with the Liberian government, said:

Really for me the war affected us greatly because for us we were living with our parents, but when the war came my father ask me to go elsewhere and remain there. So I couldn't do nothing now because I was no longer under my parents for support at the age, I was to follow up for further studies. Since the war already came they've dropped everything. I am telling you that at the age of 30 I got no school qualification but nothing here, because if the war was gone my father could have helped me and I could have something going for me. (Kamara 2006, pers. comm., 23 June)

These words are valuable for understanding how the war deeply affected every relationship in Liberia. All the changes in relationships affected and modified the networks of the people involved. The war, with all its brutality, had shattered the normal way of life, such as family bonds and community ties, forming instead more external connections and associations. Each individual became a separate entity and had to think for himself independently. Many people had no idea if their parents were alive or of their families' whereabouts, so the family network was replaced with informal structures (Utas 2005). Even where no blood ties existed, it was common to hear people referring to each other as "Dad", "Brother" and "Uncle".

Most of the Liberian population, especially former fighters, had already experienced a disconnection from their own social networks even before demobilisation. Hence UNMIL found them prepared to be delinked from their world and relocated. The demobilisation, which aimed to de-bond the soldiers from their superiors and to destroy the chain of command, also had a strong effect on their identity. While previously the fighters were bonded to their brothers-in-arms and had felt part of something, after undergoing demobilisation they were left in a state of isolation. The collective self, which had previously been the focus of their identity, was forced to give way to the individual self. After a period of expressing a sense of belonging, they were now asked to express their individuality in order to find a place in a new society.

The reaction to this new condition varied from one individual to another; it was usually influenced by many internal and external factors. The internal factors were part of an individual's personal background, such as gender, age, education, family situation, behaviour during the war, and psychological disturbances, among others. Some former fighters had a cathartic recognition of their previous actions and attempted to take a positive approach, seeing in this moment the opportunity for a new life. Sheriff, for example, says: "I feel like what I did was wrong. I don't want to be rebel or army any more in my life. I want to study medical science" (Sheriff 2006, pers. comm., 23 July). Others decided to resume the same path as before, but the DD process certainly gave them the opportunity for a new start. Robert, a former fighter aged 25 from Nimba County, who fought with LURD and now works as a labourer, said:

The DDRR programme contributed a whole lot to the youths of Liberia who participated in the war. There are other youths who did not participate in the war but they benefited from it. Today the ones who decided not to do anything at all, they are the ones on the streets who are doing bad things, [but] the ones who decided to go and learn what was opportune to them, today some of them are working, nobody knows they are ex-combs, they are doing things for themselves. They are living in an environment with all people knowing about them. (Robert 2006, pers. comm., 14 July)

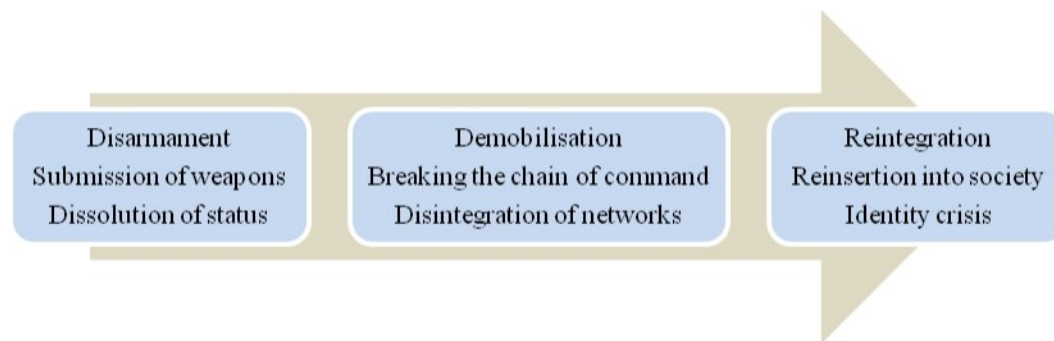
In conclusion, the end of conflict can sometimes be as traumatic as the beginning, in so far as it breaks the status quo. The status, relationships and networks of former fighters were essentially "blown up" by the end of the war, creating a sense of confusion. This uncertainty gave everyone the opportunity to make a fresh start. For some it was the starting point for a new life completely delinked from the past; for others it was just a short period of alienation that brought them back together with their fellows, with even stronger ties.

All this occurred because, after the DD phase, there was often a failure to realise the importance of protecting the supporting networks. With the DD programmes, the fighters experienced strong pressure to abandon their weapons and companions in order to return to their communities. Initially some of them tried to go back to their own community and follow the recommendation of the demobilisation programme to start a civilian life with no links with the past. In a survey conducted in 2006, "only 4 of 588 respondents indicated that they spent their free time with friends

from their former factions or the war” (Pugel 2007: 52). Despite this first phase, the former combatants’ social networks seemed to survive and sometimes became even stronger. From my experience, in most cases the wartime networks disintegrated for a short period after demobilisation, but were re-established after a brief interlude.

This short period of alienation from the old networks and the dissolution of the status of fighter created a state of confusion among most former fighters in the context of huge changes in the Liberian social structure.

Figure 3.1: Sequence of external influences on the status and networks of former fighters



3.2.3 Relationship between status and identity

Status is essential to understanding identity and inclusion. Status can be defined as a current state or condition experienced by an individual. This may include status shift and/or status dissolution. The concept of identity encompasses a wider and more specific or in-depth approach to the reasons or factors behind the status of an individual, such as personal philosophy, traits and concepts, but especially personal and social associations with other people and even networks. Therefore it is important to realise that one cannot exist without the other; this is why, when the dissolution status of former fighters is considered, it is also important to consider their identity structures and reconstruction (for more detail, see Jennings 2008). The important aspect of the relationship between status and identity is that one cannot exist without having an impact on the other. The status of an individual is basically a macro overview of the individual’s personal choices and traits in a personalised and social environment. These choices are structured by the identity of the individual. Herein lies the relationship; the identity is micro-structured while the status is macro-structured.

It is important to note here that while identity has a direct impact on the status of the individual, the relationship works both ways. The status of the individual mainly revolves around the communal aspects that the individual faces and can very easily influence the basis of personal philosophies irrespective of how strongly they are rooted. The correlation is reversible. Colin Bird argues that “the distinction between a person’s status and their identity is not always easy to see, and they often overlap (my social status can, for example, be a part of my identity: hence Louis XIV – ‘*L’état, c’est moi*’)” (Bird 2004: 221). This is because the interdependence of the two elements is natural and unbreakable. In the case of the former fighters in the period just after the end of the conflict, we can say that the dissolution of previous status directly affected identity.

The fighters, when exerting their authority on others, were not asking for admiration or high regard; they just wanted to show that they were able to maintain their status. Since the soldiers claimed to be fighting for a common good, they felt entitled to have more privileges than non-combatants. These claims of entitlement or privileged treatment are completely independent from claims about identity, although they do reflect the identity of individuals. This suggests that, unlike status, identity does not exert direct control over external factors but instead is openly influenced by them. While status gives direct access to external relationships, identity is just the fruit of these relationships. The soldiers’ status is the fruit of their interactions with society, while their identity is the way that society perceives them and how they perceive society. The recognition of a different status for the former fighters accentuates the division between them and the civilians. Identity, in this case, is linked to society’s perception of the group recognised by the name of “former fighters”.

Jennings writes about delinking. She explains that “delinking simultaneously recognises that non combatants are often in similarly dire straits as ex-combatants, and may mitigate against the hardening of group identity and lessen resentment from non combatants over preferential treatment for former fighters” (Jennings 2008: 8). This attempts to reconcile fighters and civilians by finding commonalities between them instead of differences, trying to homogenise their identities.

It counteracts the incentive structure that encourages people to claim and maintain the status of ex-combatant, while reducing the period when ex-

combatants are perceptibly differentiated from wider society. Combined with an adequate information campaign before disarmament begins, delinking would also enable the international community to provide an immediate and concrete benefit without creating false or unrealistic expectations. Furthermore, it would help resolve the entry criteria problem, making for less friction between the security and development ends of the programme. (Jennings, 2008: 8)

The delinking process includes both status and identity:

‘Combatants’ are socialised into ‘soldier’ status, and this remains the prime identity for many. ‘Ex-combatant’ identities are situated both in conflict and transition. How ex-combatants negotiate various war-generated identities when they depart from militarized structures is a much neglected area. The expectation, it frequently seems, is that ex-combatants will simply leave war-generated identities behind. (Gear 2002: 141).

This process of homogenization of identities in Liberia also includes the concept of collectivity. The process of status and identity construction in fact is not restricted just to the subjects; it is essential to consider the group. Status and identity in this case are linked to a group of people who had something in common that made them gather together on a certain level because of shared similarities. As stated above when considering the former fighters as a group with its own identity, it is interesting to refer to certain studies on organisational identity in order to compare with others. As with organisations, the variable that measures the level of inclusion of the group in the social fabric is the position of its members in society. This inclusion, or exclusion, is essential in status and identity construction. The changes and the similarities that led to group reunion are the basis of the creation of a new place in society and “the wearing of a new suit” so as to be accepted by others. This “suit” is the new status and identity they have chosen or that has been chosen for them, even if in a sub-conscious way, as a reaction to the external and internal pressures they have been facing since the end of the war.

A large group of former fighters that could not find their place in the new society have created a kind of self-defence mechanism as a means of survival. Self-exclusion, sometimes generated by society itself, defending other members, associating with other former fighters and blaming others, are the best instruments

they use to shape their new identity. Their gathering together, which began during the war period, is due to the necessity of the individual to assimilate and share the same or similar experiences in order to feel a sense of belonging.

The exclusion of the former fighters from the community mostly arises because of the violent behaviour associated with their group. Marshall B. Clinard (1949) suggests that it is possible to combat delinquent behaviour by including a group in a normal social context. He based his findings on a survey carried out in 1944 by the California Youth Authority in conjunction with the War Department. In an effort to socially reintegrate a group of youths, 150 delinquent boys were placed in an army barracks and allowed to work alongside civilians. By being allowed to work under normal social circumstances, notable changes arose in the boys' behaviour – “in work habits, in the conceptions of themselves, and in changing anti-social group objectives which are reinforced in conventional institutional groups” (Ellingston 1948: 101).

Clinard (1949) refers to the effectiveness of group psychotherapy in prisons to treat offenders while recognising that offenders are not all “mentally abnormal”. We can directly relate this to the rehabilitation and reintegration of the former fighters. By providing useful reintegration programmes and allowing the former fighters to function and work in normal social circumstances, while receiving psychological support, it is possible for them to re-associate with their identity before the conflict and to abandon the identity of former fighter.

As in the prisoners' rehabilitation, it is necessary to incorporate what Clinard refers to as “guided group interaction” by not assuming that the former fighters have mental illnesses. Clinard (1949) suggests that the success of the programmes may not be due to the psychiatric treatment the offenders receive but more to the fact that they are part of a group. In this context, the group member tends to become more introspective and reflective, and “the belligerent, over-assertive, anti-social rehabilitee is brought into line by his fellows and the asocial, shy, withdrawn person is drawn into the conversation” (Abrahams and McCorkle 1946: 32).

The author also reports on research into social disorganisation that shows how the group approach has been applied to bring about community reintegration. It appears that the former fighters' sharing of a group identity and a “place of belonging in the local structure” (Clinard 1949: 6) could have direct and positive consequences

for the community at large. He also asserts that group identity has a direct impact on “delinquency, crime, mental disease, suicide, race and ethnic conflict” (Clinard 1949: 6) and can reduce disorganisation in society. In the long term, being part of a group can help the individual to gain a positive self-image and transcend stigmas and negative identities and labels.

3.2.4 External factors: formal and informal recognition of a new category of ex-combatant – the “neglected veteran”

The DD process not only introduced changes in the social structure of Liberia but also legitimised the formation of a new social category in that structure. The demotion of the fighter from a higher position in society and the temporary disintegration of their support networks was not the only consequence of disarmament and demobilisation. The implementation of the peace agenda shifted a warlike Liberian society to a state of peace. This change re-established all the characteristics of a system of standard socio-economic stratification. Liberian society began again to value variables such as income, education and employment, each of which contributes (as argued above) to status. The dispute in the country changed from military to political as civilians regained power, to the detriment of the soldiers. Fighters were now seen as a threat to peace and as a collection of unskilled, unemployed and confused individuals struggling to find their position in society. Some fighters who were able go back to their families or community disappeared into the general masses. Others who were more skilful and adaptable found their place in the new society. However, a number of former fighters found it more difficult to become reintegrated and were set apart from society. This group shares common socio-economic conditions and represents a specific social category in Liberian society. This sub-section of the thesis analyses the formation of this group and its formal and informal recognition by society as a discrete category. More evidence of the existence of this group can be found in the self-categorisation described by former fighters during my research (discussed below).

The first confirmation of former fighters being a category in itself is the formal classification made by the DD process. After handing over weapons in the cantonments, former fighters received an identification card with their socio-economic data. They were screened, registered and entitled to financial and support

benefits (UNDP 2004). Establishing criteria for those entitled to social and economic benefits can be considered a formal identification process. Jenkins (1996: 103) asserts that there are two modes of collective identification. In the first, members recognise themselves as being part of a group; in the second, they are recognised by others as belonging to a specific category. The internal identification defines the group, while the external defines the category. According to the author, discussing a concept expressed by Nadel (in Jenkins 1996: 103), these approaches are merely different ways of looking at the interaction between individuals. This thesis argues that, in the case of former fighters in Liberia, the identification occurs on both levels, external and internal. The theory of this work is based on what former fighters said, in their own words: essentially, how they perceive themselves. They identify themselves with a group, while others see them as members of a specific category. The legitimisation of the category of former fighters occurred during the DD process. The identification card given to former fighters during the DD phase is a formal recognition of the privileges of a special category. This process of classification acknowledged the formal creation of a new social category.

In other countries former fighters were seen as a particular social category. According to Gear, “the interest in ‘ex-combatants’ as a social category derives from the fact that they possess military skills and have, for significant periods of time, led a ‘military life’” (Gear 2002: 12). A category involving military skills usually implies the lack of employable skills among its members. An extended study of other African countries such as Angola, Chad, Mozambique, Uganda and Zimbabwe describes the category of former fighters as lacking the minimum job and social skills needed for full social and economic reintegration (Colletta 1997). Sometimes this category has been defined as a group with special needs, differentiating its members from others, raising the concern about special treatment that creates a differentiation from civilians. This differentiation would be easier to avoid if it were ensured that they are not treated as “a special group among the community, so that they receive neither more nor fewer privileges than their neighbours” (NGO Networking Service 1996: 79). For Kingma (2000: 12), former fighters “remain the most organised group in society and are able to respond to a call to come together at very short notice”.

The legitimisation of this category is not the only effect of the establishment of the DDR; another legacy of this process has been the “labelling” of the members of

this category as “ex-combatants”, with all the consequences. Before proceeding to analyse the sociological implication of the expression “ex-combatants” it is essential to clarify the meaning of this expression. The term “ex-combatant” is widely used by many authors and in different ways throughout recent literature regarding post-conflict environments, whatever the content or aim of the papers. Even if the argument concerns mental health or the informal economy, the authors use the term to refer to the category of soldiers at the end of the war. It is assumed that this term identifies a group with particular sociological, economic or political perspectives. The use of the term has proliferated; it is commonly used also by practitioners who operate in recovery and reconstruction in countries emerging from conflict. With the multiple specialisations of the peacekeeping operations conducted by various international organisations, the actors operating in the field needed a standard term for the fighters, to avoid confusion. A term was needed for identifying the people who had fought during the war and needed to be assisted, as they were seen as a vulnerable group. Civil society, NGOs, UN agencies and multilateral actors recognise the term “ex-combatants” as identifying this category. After the use of the Peace Support Operation mechanism intensified around the world, standardisation helped to identify the former participants in conflicts as “ex-combatants”, whether they were of South African, Pakistani or other origin. In every article, manual and technical paper regarding the post-conflict zone, the term appeared, with all its connotations.

According to many studies, ex-combatants are mostly composed of people who were recorded and classified during the DD phase and were later sent to be reintegrated through pre-selected programmes. This classification recognises all the attributes that can distinguish individuals. Age, gender, education, ethnicity and so on, are not significant for this classification; the only important identifying factor is the fact that they wielded a gun during the war – or, in some cases, only at the moment when the cantonments opened their gates for weapons collection. In everyday use, “ex-combatant” refers to whoever took part in the war as a fighter, regardless of individual attributes, and needs to be helped.

This term has been widely used without considering its full implications. In some cases, identifying subjects with a particular label can deeply influence the future of the individual in terms of personality, behaviour, acceptance and future personal development. The term “ex-combatant” became commonly used in day-to-day

language, turning it from something conceptual to something real. While previously the term was impersonal and detached from any meaning, apart from identifying former soldiers, it has acquired some specific connotations. In many cases, the classification and registration during the DD phase “had the side effect of codifying ex-combatant identity. This labelling of ex-combatants as a group with shared problems made state interventions possible” (Metsola 2006: 1126). Labelling this group “ex-combatants” has established a specific sociological recognition in society.

In the literature, most writers use the term in a neutral way, by not giving a positive or negative connotation to the group a priori. The negative connotations associated with the term “ex-combatants” have been expressed mainly by the local population, and they originated in attitudes within the Liberian communities. Authors, however, remain unaffected by the common use of this term; “ex-combatant” simply refers to those who fought during the war and does not include other sociological, economic or psychological characterisations. This is mostly because “[t]he majority of ex-combatants were ordinary people who joined armed groups based on various ideas concerning protection and opportunity” (Bøas and Hatløy 2008: 45) and were supposed to go back to their previous lives at the end of the war. The only clear identification was that “there is the clear break between combatant and non-combatant groups” (Hazen 2007: 2). Since my work adds a further implication to the term “ex-combatants”, classifying them as a particular group of former fighters who do not feel reintegrated, it is essential to identify additional points of characterisation and find a new term for the refined definition. In some cases, the group of ex-combatants is not even seen by the authors as a special category in Liberian society because “the ex-combatants’ background is ... surprisingly normal” (Bøas and Hatløy, 2008: 42) and their reintegration into the communities should be conducted, it is proposed, without separation from other groups:

DDRR is very much a reaction to the notion that these people are stigmatized from society, set apart in their own world, and therefore need reintegration. However, the ex-combatants in our sample do not fit this picture very well. They are not a world apart from their parents, relatives and local communities, but are in fact living with them (Bøas and Hatløy 2008: 52).

In other cases (Colletta 1997; Date-Bah 2003) it is easy to find the “idea of ex-combatants as a specially disadvantaged group” (Jennings 2008: 13). According to my

research, there is a middle ground: not all ex-combatants are perceived negatively and not all of them are perceived positively. This conclusion is discussed below, where a distinction is made between those who live normally in the communities and those who are not part of the new social fabric – for whom a new term is desirable. However, for some authors the ex-combatants are just another minor social group who do not need special consideration when it comes to reconstructing Liberian society. For others, they are part of a larger, more vulnerable category of people who must be helped, but are not different from other groups such as women, returnees and internal displaced peoples (IDPs).

While in the literature the word “ex-combatant” is mostly used with a neutral meaning, it commonly has negative connotations. The statement that those “who did belong to a faction have mostly returned to their home communities without ever picking up the ‘tag’ as ex-combatants” (Bøas and Hatløy 2008: 38) confirms this – because this “tag” is not seen as constructive for the communities or the former fighters:

There is often a desire to stop using the moniker “ex-combatant” after the reintegration process. There are good reasons for this. The use of such a term can lead to negative stigmatization of ex-combatants, and further hinder their reintegration into a community. (Hazen 2007: 7)

So the term in itself does not have negative associations; these arise because of the characteristics that are associated with it. In common usage, the prefix “ex” means that something had validity in the past. What is significant in this case is how the prefix is attached to a noun indicating a person’s status. It thus refers to a status that was gained in the past and has been lost. For example, in the expressions, “ex-president”, “ex-convict”, etc. we are referring to people who had a particular status at a certain point of their lives and then lost it or acquired a different one.

A positive or negative implication mostly depends on how the previous status is perceived. The term “ex-combatants” tends not to identify them as normal civilians but rather as people whose past actions carry on into the present:

Once people see two or three people who fight the war together, they will say: “Ah! look, here the bad people going there oh!” So many of us who fight the war can be afraid to come together in group; the people always say bad things about us as ex-combatants; they sometime call us arm robbers. (Dahn

2009, pers. comm., 16 May)

Dahn is a former fighter, aged 27, who comes from Bomi County and fought with ULIMO. He expresses how past actions are associated with negative feelings. Many interviews outline how the label “ex-combatant” is given negative connotations:

I think they see us as rebels but to tell us it is hard. Though they can say people have rebel attitude, but to look in the eyes of me and say I am a rebel has not happened. But generally, they see us as bad people. (Love 2009, pers. comm., 9 May)

This is Love’s response to the question on how her community perceives the ex-combatants and how they refer to them. Civilians regard them with circumspection and even fear. They associate the term “ex-combatant” with the word “rebel”. They, of course, see themselves differently:

Love: I see myself as a Liberian and human being.

Interviewer: Do you see yourself as a rebel or bad person?

Love: Oh no, I see myself as a former fighter but a changed and good woman because no disadvantage again.

Interviewer: But why if you see disadvantage again, will you go back to fight?

Love: Oh yes, because I hate. (Love 2009, pers. comm., 9 May)

Love’s choice of words is significant. She does not refer to herself as an “ex-combatant” but as a former fighter who chose to be a decent woman because there is no longer a need for violence in the new environment. In another interview, with a former fighter called Dell, it is clear that the “ex-combatants” are usually identified with bad actions, with no distinction between them:

Interviewer: Today, in your opinion, how does your community look upon the population of ex-combatants?

Dell: Ugly and bad people.

Interviewer: How do you see yourself?

Dell: Though a former fighter ... I see myself as better now than during the war.

Interviewer: How do the communities see you?

Dell: I want believe just how my community sees me. That is a former fighter.

Interviewer: What about some of your friends who were reintegrated?

Dell: The same was how they see me, that is how they see them too. (Dell 2009, pers. comm., 18 May)

These and many interviews reveal the attitude of some former fighters, who identify themselves with different terms. From the former fighters' perspective, the word "ex-combatant" provokes unpleasant sensations and is a reminder of non-acceptance by the community. The term "former fighter" has been used to indicate reintegration and those who do not have difficulties in gaining acceptance. Terms such as "old rebel" or "ex-combatant" have been mostly used to indicate those rejected by the community. This potential confusion supports my decision to associate those who feel accepted and included with the general term "former fighter" and those who experience feelings of lack of acceptance and exclusion with an alternative term, "neglected veteran".

This thesis uses this term only for those who do not feel reintegrated or part of society. This use of the term is not shared by all authors. The term "ex-combatant" has already been associated with a particular category of former fighters. In Mozambique, it referred to the former members of the liberation army, excluding other combatants (Kingma 2000). Agreeing with the fact that "not all the ex-combatants are alike" (Jennings 2008: 9), my work establishes a differentiation between those who feel they are positively received and those who feel they are not. It is therefore important at this stage to identify a specific term for the latter. The question is: are all the former fighters simply a group, without distinctive elements of identification? According to my work they are not, because inside the group of former fighters there is a subdivision.

The characteristics that define the group of "neglected veterans" represent a small demarcation that is mostly at the subconscious level. Analysing the

conversations with former fighters, it is clear from the beginning that this categorisation is virtual, not concrete; it derives from an individual's impressions and perceptions. Given its intangible nature, the classification "neglected veteran" does not arise from the actions of the subjects, but from their feelings and sensations. This baggage of common feelings and emotions is part of the internal factors that characterised the identity transformation process of the whole group of former fighters.

3.2.5 Internal factors: former fighters' sensations and emotions

The previous sub-section analysed the two major external factors that influenced the life of former fighters after the war: disarmament and demobilisation. The consequences of these were the dissolution of the status of "fighter", the temporary disintegration of support networks and the creation of a new social category, the ex-combatants. These external interventions produced changes in society and in the lives of the former fighters, leading to an internal state of confusion. This sub-section analyses their common feelings and sensations experienced during this phase, which contributed to the state of confusion. For some of them, this was a temporary state; for others it is more permanent and is one of the main reasons for the failure to reintegrate. During my interviews and informal conversations, it was possible to isolate some of the mental and emotional perceptions which can be equated to feelings of betrayal, abandonment, loneliness and discrimination. The main purpose of this sub-section is to explore these common traits experienced by some former fighters, which hinder their reintegration into society and contribute to their position of "neglected veterans".

Interviewer: I would like to find out more from you, how do you feel now that the war has ended?

Prince: Yes is true the war has ended, but there is still problem.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Prince: Because we are suffering and nobody cares for us.

Interviewer: Can you explain better?

Prince: When we were fighting in Lofa, the President gave us one million

United States dollars to clear Lofa. Our General Roland Duo told us, since we were on the front line, he was using the money to build for us housing units; which would have been given to us when the war was finished. After the war ended, some of us who survived came and told him about our houses, because he knew that war was over. He told us he never had any houses for anybody. When he told us this, some of the men said we should go to the compound over night and kill him. As for me, I told them I do not want to; but they still went over night, they missed Roland Duo but chopped one of his brother head. When day broke, he carried police to our houses and we were arrested and taken to the police station. At the police station, the boys admitted that they went to there to kill him because he lied to us and stole the money the President gave to us to build the houses he is now having. As we speak the houses are on the Roberts Field International Airport halfway. They also told the police that I Prince was not part of the mission that night, so I was free but he gave the police money and today the boys are still in jail.

Interviewer: What do you think about this situation?

Prince: Roland Duo betrayed us and since the war ended everybody turned their backs on us.

Interviewer: Are you saying you feel discriminated against and marginalised?

Prince: Yes, it is hard to get work, nobody care for us except our friends, former fighters some times when we meet in the ghetto. (Prince 2006, pers. comm., 20 September)

The interview with Prince, aged 23, from Nimba County, who fought with the governmental forces, summarises perfectly the feelings of most former fighters after the war. Some of them had violent reactions, others forgot about the past, and others just did not integrate with society, but most of them had these feelings of resentment against society or their own commanders.

The DD phase left the group of ex-combatants in a state of confusion about their position in society, which triggered a series of internal disorders. Questions arose about both new and old relationships, which generated inner doubts. For some former fighters, this confusion is temporary, marking a period of transition in their lives, while for others it is a more permanent state. The label of ex-combatant, which carries

with it negative associations and creates a sense of disapproval by civilians, aggravates this condition. This then modulates into stigmatization, as some of them assert:

Sometimes in my community I am referred to as old rebel or old killer. But in that case I do not get angry because if I want to change my character from the above, I must not show weakness to that stigmatism in order to remove it.

(Roosevelt 2006, pers. comm., 24 September)

Roosevelt is a 34-year-old former fighter who joined ULIMO in 1992. From his interview we can see that the stigma goes beyond being a result of personal behaviour, but is also a consequence of the DDR process which isolated the neglected veterans as a minority group, further contributing to widening the gap between soldier and civilian.

This gap generated different reactions in the former fighters in terms of emotions and feelings. One of the feelings quite common among them is the sense of betrayal and abandonment. Since the end of the war, high-ranking people have often sought a position in the Liberian army, looking after themselves while abandoning the rest of the soldiers to their destiny. While such high-ranking officers climbed the ranks in government service, most of the normal soldiers were struggling for survival. While the demobilisation process worked well to break the chain of command, the former fighters were developing a sense of betrayal and abandonment since, during the war, they had trusted their high-ranking officers or brothers in arms and expected to be looked after at the end of the conflict. "I feel betrayal," said Ben (Ben 2006, pers. comm., 3 August) when I asked him how he felt:

Some [of the former comrades] benefited from the school as they got a lot of money from international organisations in the country. Some of our bigger brothers are working in the ministry as they have a relationship with the past government, the rebel government. They give jobs to people with a lot of family. We put the government into power. A power-sharing government after the war. At least our brothers are happy that they have jobs and they have money to feed their families. There is no help from the government in this country. There were a lot of projects after the war and we can see how people live when they are not rebels. The international community visit people in the country and give them money. (Ben 2006, pers. comm., Monrovia 3 August)

Ben (aka Putu), aged 32 from Ganta, fought with the government forces. I met him on a beach with two of his friends, Patrick and Andy. They met in 2001 when they were sent to fight the rebels coming from Guinea and Sierra Leone. We were introduced by a common friend who initiated me into the group as his “brother”. The conversation started with the initial standard question “Are you American?” They seemed to think that every foreigner in Liberia was an American, and laughed when I said I was Italian. When the conversation turned to the conflict, they released all their resentment. Ben answered my question directly about his feelings, saying he felt betrayed. For Ben, the officers were gaining power and resources with the intervention of the international community and were gradually forgetting about the conflict and their old comrades. The normal soldiers were excluded from the process of power-sharing and felt left out of the reintegration process. The fact that “others”, rather than they, benefited from the peace process was seen by them as a betrayal.

In certain cases the officers also took advantage of their own soldiers. Patrick said: “We were supposed to get money from the DDR project to go to school but the general took the money as we were in the bush and there was nobody to come and get us” (Patrick 2009, pers. comm., 3 August). This illegal system also enlarged the gap between them and the commanders. When directly asked what he thought about his former commanders, he answered: “Now that the war is finished we don’t owe them anything. We have friends who send us money but the commanders they have many things. Our things are finished” (Patrick 2009, pers. comm., 3 August).

The issue of the corruption of the former leaders has been addressed in other works. Dufka (HRW 2005: 50–51) found evidence in her interviews of this illicit practice in Liberia and Sierra Leone. According to her work, senior officers had informal control over the access to benefits for their former comrades. There was a sort of black market of benefits that were sold in exchange for a part of the profits. This mechanism was set up even before the opening of the cantonments, when UNMIL allowed the commanders to take control of the weapons for security reasons. In return, the commanders were supposed to submit lists with the names of the fighters owning guns and entitled to enter the DD programmes. However, as Dufka (HRW 2005: 51) affirms, “the lists appeared to be easily manipulated, and in many cases, never materialized. The U.N. and national administrators of both the Sierra Leonean and Liberian disarmament processes appeared to provide inadequate scrutiny

of this process”. The effectiveness of the system put in place was strengthened by the commander/subordinate relationship that had been maintained during the conflict. According to Dufka (HRW 2005: 52), the phenomenon was more prevalent in Sierra Leone than in Liberia, especially because in that country the decision to join the forces was more out of free will: “Since most CDF [Sierra Leonean Civil Defense Force] militia men had initially volunteered for service out of genuine concern for their communities, they described a profound sense that they had been betrayed by their commanders and government militia officials whom they accused of stealing their benefits” (HRW 2005: 51).

However, according to my interviews, even if corruption in Liberia was not as extensive as in Sierra Leone, the sense of betrayal by their own comrades was a strong feeling, recognisable in most neglected veterans. Most of them found it unfair that some of their companions, especially high-ranking officers, had found elevated positions in society as compared to their own low-level status. This sense of betrayal derives sometimes from the non-fulfilment of expectations. The period after the end of the war was precarious for the security, stability and development of Liberia, but the positive approach of the actors involved in the process of reintegration created expectations of recovery among the international community, the former fighters and the local communities. The debate on expectations offers particular points of interest when considering reintegration as policy intervention with an indefinite timescale and non-standardised goals. From this point of view, reintegration is an open-ended scheme engendering different and occasionally unclear promises. The effect is a system hampered by unfulfilled guarantees, unsatisfied objectives, unintended implications, and related instability. According to Alusala (2008: 11) in the paragraph “Inability to ‘Manage Expectations’”,

In situations where poverty, conflict and resources (such as money in the case of Liberia) are concerned, and especially one in which the criteria was quite integrated (for the first time in the history of the UN DDR processes), the planning should have taken into consideration the expectations of the society in order to avoid a bloated caseload.

This chaos generated by the lack of clearly identified and practical objectives for reintegration created unrealistic and unattainable expectations (Jennings 2008b).

These unfulfilled promises and false expectations could be counterproductive for the process itself and consequently the stability of Liberia.

Efficient and dependable reintegration depends on setting a clearly specified endpoint and looking at assets, methods and capability, along with the regional framework, such as the socioeconomic, protection and political restrictions. Failure to determine this endpoint and to ensure that expectations will be fulfilled deeply affects the security and stability of a country. This concept indicates the degree to which security and expectations intersect or compete with one another. The failure of the reintegration process to fulfil these general expectations generated a series of different reactions to the relations between the communities and the former fighters. Many of the latter were promised resources and support after handing over weapons as compensation for their services. This strategy was used by some commanders to induce the soldiers to surrender the guns through false promises. Peter K., aged 29 from Lofa County, a former fighter who fought for LURD against the government forces in the second civil war, explains:

They tell us that they were going to send some people to go to school until they finish with university; some promised us where we wanted work we'll work for plenty money. In fact, they say that the big big people were going to help us with our children, school and medicine. (Peter K., pers. comm., 20 May 2009)

The neglected veterans felt there had been a violation of trust and confidence by the commanders. This sense of betrayal was often caused by the dissolution of long-term, trusting relationships between some of the fighters and their senior officers. The soldiers who enlisted in the factions for more ideological reasons and for longer periods were the ones who experienced this feeling most intensely. Some of these soldiers wanted to fight to improve their personal conditions or for the good of the country. The hope was that when the war was over they could acquire a better position in society. This view is shared by Richards (1995, 1996, 2005) and Utas (2003, 2005, 2008). Peter K. also confirms that the violation of the promises of the commanders and the non-fulfilment of the former fighters' expectations was the cause of the sense of betrayal:

I think so because when I joined them, my commander called General Bad Blood tell me and the other fighter that some big people in the country and

outside the country were going to take good care of us after the war because we were freeing the Liberian people for them. (Peter K., pers. comm., 20 May 2009)

Peter K. was promised the same as Patrick and his former comrades. Everyone fighting in the war, whether government troops or rebels, was directly promised or was expecting a better position in society. This expectation is universal in every war and among any kind of warring faction. However, for the Liberian soldiers the outcome was disappointing as they ended up with an interim government demobilising the majority of both factions. The end of the conflict brought everyone to the same level, identifying them as ex-combatants, complete with the negative prejudices associated with this status. The sense of betrayal was evident among all the former fighters, regardless of the warring sides they fought for.

Many former fighters speak in their conversations about being forgotten, as they expected to be rewarded after the conflict. The general expectation among them was that they would be granted a better position when peace returned. As Massaquoi, a 22-year-old former fighter from Nimba who fought with LURD, says: “Our people forget about us. Some of us are on our own, that just God blessing some of us with food. Me I here nobody care for me” (Massaquoi 2009, pers. comm., 18 May).

The gap between former fighters was further widened when the post-war expectations of many were not met. Interviews with neglected veterans show that this generated feelings of being discriminated against. Exclusion from social and political life, and a sense of neglect and abandonment by communities and families accentuated this feeling. Andy, aged 30 from Lofa, who fought with the government forces, said in his interview:

Interviewer: Do you think there's discrimination for everyone in Liberia or just for ex-combatants?

Andy: Just for ex-combs.

Interviewer: Were you promised benefits, jobs?

Andy: As soon as they find out you were ex-comb they don't give you work and no one was happy. People did not want to see you.

Interviewer: So what is your feeling about it?

Andy: They discriminate us. They're rebels; they kill a lot of people. That's why they have nothing to feed on, they do whatever they can to get what they

want. (Andy 2006, pers. comm., 3 August)

In another interview, Dahn explains:

The time the war started, my small brother called Boye and small sister called Mamie followed some people to Ivory Coast with our mother and I think they went to school there. Boye was lucky to travel to America. When the war finished and my sister and mother came back to Liberia, Boye usually send money to my mother and sister who presently attending the University of Liberia, but when I call him [Boye], he tell me that I was not serious and so he don't regard me as his big brother; when he finished talking to me like that, he will not send anything for me. Right now I feel that I am not part of our family anymore because our mother cannot even say anything. (Dahn 2009, pers. comm., 16 May)

As we can see from these conversations, this sense of disloyalty is just part of a condition that included several other emotions. The distrust of former comrades was always accompanied by a sense of abandonment and discrimination by family and community. This is because the association with the group of ex-combatants is prejudicial at both a political and social level. John B., aged 26, from Margibi County, fought with the GOL and expresses this feeling of rejection: "Chief, yourself can see that the one there, our friend oh, our people and even the big big people in this government not get time for anyone they call former fighter or rebel. We just fighting for our living" (John B. 2009, pers. comm., 20 May).

The negative view of the whole category of ex-combatants as a ruthless and cruel group creates a gap between them and the rest of the population. According to Hazen (2007: 2), "Combatants who commit atrocities against members of their communities strike the most violent blow to social unity, and these combatants are quickly ostracized from their communities. These forces divide communities along chosen allegiances". This is true in cases where particular acts of violence can be directly associated with the perpetrator, but most of the fighters are not known by the community but are instead stigmatised for violent acts they are assumed to have committed by participating in the war. This generates a general stigmatisation for the entire category of ex-combatants as result of a clear divide between combatants and non-combatants. This division emphasises the sense of victimisation by the former fighters. In one conversation Josiah said:

My own people called me bad man. Nobody get time for us who fight war. Our own cousin who are now working for Ellen Johnson Sirleaf government do not even want to hear about us or see us. They have forgotten or abandoned us. (Josiah 2009, pers. comm., 20 May)

These common feelings experienced by many of the former fighters as betrayal, abandonment and discrimination suggest that they lost faith in their comrades, families and community, which jeopardised their sense of belonging to the warring factions. The motivational properties of collective identities are systematically documented in Baumeister and Leary's (1995) comprehensive review of the evidence in support of a fundamental "need to belong" as an innate feature of human nature. This detachment from the factions and the loss of a sense of belonging then generated a sense of loneliness among the neglected veterans. This experience, according to Weiss, is not caused by being alone but by the absence of some essential relationships in people's lives (Weiss 1973: 17). From this point of view, loneliness in the lives of the neglected veterans can be seen as a reaction to the dissolution of their supporting networks. "Loneliness is the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relations is deficient in some important way, either quantitatively or qualitatively" (Perlman and Peplau 1981: 31). The following chapter analyses the isolation of some former fighters as a reaction to this feeling of loneliness.

All these feelings and reactions to the end of the conflict represent the theoretical evidence of what has been argued above about status, networks and the "neglected veteran" label. Loneliness, a sense of abandonment and feelings of betrayal are evidence of the temporary disintegration of supporting networks. The feeling of discrimination confirms the dissolution of the status of fighter and the consequent negative categorisation. All these feelings represent the internal factors that provoke the state of confusion shared by former fighters, even if for many it lasted only for a short period.

3.2.6 "Former fighter" as primary identity

Establishing a discourse on primary identity automatically implies the existence of multiple identities. There would not be a primary identity without the presence of

others. The confirmation of their existence entails also the interaction between them. In the investigation of interaction between the primary and other identities present in the former fighters in Liberia, it is essential not to overlook certain historical and cultural factors. It is necessary to analyse other identities that have been reasons for the conflict, such as ethnicity and youth.

The disarmament and demobilisation of the warring factions shifts the focus of the former fighters' primary identity from the collective self to the individual self. The first element affected by the DD and the new social order was the status of the fighters; the disarmament process ended the privileged position of the soldiers. In a kind of domino effect, the dissolution of the previous status of fighter together with the demobilisation contributed to the temporary disintegration of their war networks. These external factors triggered an internal state of confusion provoked by issues of acceptance (community) and belonging (warring factions).

Hazen (2007: 5) synthesizes this process precisely and briefly:

The demilitarisation and demobilisation processes are extremely threatening to combatants and generate anxiety, fear, and insecurity because the process destroys the social network on which the combatant has relied for many years. The loss of this social network, the war family, creates a tremendous sense of insecurity for ex-combatants. Through the DDR process, combatants lose their social status, their sense of belonging, their sense of importance, their income or access to basic goods, their support network, and their identity.

Liberian society experienced an exceptional transformation at the end of the conflict in terms of both rapidity and range. Along with this radical change in the social order, the roles of people in society have also been transformed, affecting their identity. This identity transformation process differs from the natural evolution of adult identity changes because of its swiftness and the complete changing of the roles in society. This speed and range did not give the individuals time to undergo a natural, progressive process of identity development. As stated above, the notion of identity is not static but continually in progress (Jackson and Warren 2005; Moran 2006). This process of change must follow the natural course of time to allow it to develop and be successful. The speed of the changes generated by the end of the war created

uncertainty in the identity of most of the former fighters, leading to an internal state of confusion. But how is this confusion connected with identity?

When analysing the transformation which occurred in the former fighter, we have to consider that the turning point of the end of the war was a traumatic event for the soldiers. During the conflict the soldiers were on top of the power pyramid; when peace was restored to the country they lost their authority. This was mostly the case for ordinary soldiers; those who were more high-ranking officials learnt how to recycle their position at a political level. The consequences of these sudden changes affected the entire Liberian population, but in particular the fighters. Therefore internal and external elements deeply affected their personalities, their relationships and their behaviours.

The DDR programme was established at the end of the war with the explicit purpose of disconnecting fighters from their brothers-in-arms in order to break the chain of command. The “war family” was by then the only social group left for many of the soldiers, and their only bonds or connections were with other participants in the factions. The strong sense of belonging and loyalty to the warring factions saw the primary identity shifting from individual to collective for those who were not part of other groups. At this point the only way to sever these relationships between comrades to avoid the outbreak of future hostilities was to disarm and demobilise them through the DDR programme. The disarmament and demobilisation of the soldiers was not just a pragmatic mechanism of conflict resolution but affected also other important social components of the war society: the identity of the fighters.

The withdrawal of weapons during the disarmament phase is symbolic of the de-ranking of a position of power to a lower step on the pyramid. The demobilisation was designed instead for delinking the soldiers from their military lives. Both of these external procedures catapulted the soldiers into a post-conflict society and turned their lives upside down.

The concept of the former fighters’ primary identity as an expression of the collective self is part of the self-categorisation process and it is central to the debate on identity transformation. The construction of the former fighters’ self-concept must be seen as divided into two different levels. Social theory asserts that we must distinguish between the individual self and the social self as two different levels of self-categorisation (Turner *et al.* 1994: 454). In the self-categorisation, the individual

self is defined by the unique characteristics of the person in terms of differences from others. The collective self is instead defined by the common characteristics shared with others. The balance of these two elements is essential for the identification of the primary identity.

Individual self and collective self coexist in any individual at any time of life, but not at the same level. The identification of the primary identity originates in the shifts from the uniqueness of the individual to the similarities of the group. This shift, in the case of the former fighters, produces identity transformation, which occurred several times. Before the war their collective identity may have superseded the individual one, or vice versa. Any of them could have been perceived according to his ethnicity, age, political ideas, religion and so on, or could have been seen just as isolated individuals. Their personal or collective identity could have identified them but certainly none of them was categorised as part of the group of fighters.

The first recognition of the collective self linked to the group of fighters occurs during the war when the soldiers were considered by others as part of warring factions. This represents the first mutual common step of each member of the group of former fighters. Joining the factions represents the root of the former fighters' group identification. Before this point there were no common identifications for all the members of the group. People with different behaviour, personalities, ethnicity, religion, age and so on converge for the first time into a recognisable group. In terms of social identity, for the first time people with different backgrounds merged their individual self and different collective selves into the fighter identity. Joining the conflict represents square zero of the former fighters' group identity.

The intensity, extent and extreme cruelty of the Liberian war strengthened the collective identity of the fighters in terms of a sense of belonging. During the intensification of the conflict almost half of the Liberian population was internally displaced or became refugees in neighbouring countries (UNHCR 2003). Between 250,000 and 400,000 died from war-related causes. All these factors caused among the fighters a deep separation from community and stronger bonds with comrades. As Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot (2003: 35) explain, "Militias are providing fighters with a renewed identity. Initiation rituals transform them into respected guards of their community while at the same time clearly severing all of their links with their former social environment." Therefore most of the fighters abandoned their previous

identities to embrace the identity of the new group that incorporated them, thus emphasising their collective self.

This identity transformation is the first specific characteristic of the group of former fighters, but not the only one. Another, and more relevant for this thesis, occurs at the end of the war. As stated above, this identity transformation differed from others in terms of speed and range.

The abrupt change in the Liberian social order caused by the implementation of the peace agreement did not leave enough time for the group of “fighters” to adapt. This difficult adaptation was amplified by the fact that most of the fighters were not able to recall their previous identity or did not have time to develop a strong individual identity before the war. An important aspect to take into consideration is that the average age of the demobilised soldiers was 25.3 (NCDDRR 2004: 3). In many cases the fighters were going through childhood or adolescence when they joined the war. With such a low average age, we can consider that before the war most of the fighters had no time to build up a durable position in Liberian society, based on a strong ethnic, regional or religious identity. The factional affiliation as primary identity overruled the earlier recognition as members of ethnic clans, secret societies or religious groups.

Since identity is by nature in continual formation, the construction of a social identity at any stage of life is characterised by personal choices regarding who and what to associate with. In the case of the fighters during the war, the approach to identity concerns a person’s connection to others and to the particular group of warring factions. To describe this full commitment to the group of former fighters, which completely overwhelmed their individuality, we can now refer to the organisational identity theory. However, Pratt (1988), based on works by Turner *et al.* (1994), says that members of a group identify themselves as belonging to a local organisation (formal or informal), and also identify themselves with “encompassing organizational form”. This organisational form entails the concept of commitment. Foreman and Whetten also write about affective and continuance commitment, a concept developed by Meyer and Allen (1984). According to Meyer and Allen (1997: 11) affective commitment to an organisation concerns how the member “wants” to be a part of the organisation, while continuance commitment concerns the member’s “needs”, as he or she sees them, to be a part of the organisation. If we analyse

affective and continuance commitment to the group of former fighters, we see how most of the time there was the presence of both what they needed and what they wanted. This created a strong long-term commitment that clouded the rest of their decisions.

In conclusion, the concept of identity is central in order to analyse the changing context of Liberia after the conflict. The establishment of a new social order entirely changes the lives of the former fighters. This mutation has a direct consequence on the social identity of the fighters because it triggers a process of identity transformation.

3.2.7 The state of confusion as a possible symptom of an identity crisis

The identification of the fighters with their peers collapsed when they, too, were no longer confident of their identity. This collapse led to a state of confusion, echoed in the voices of the former fighters. In some cases this confusion could be identified as part of an identity crisis. It is not the intention of this thesis to demonstrate that the first phase of identity transformation of the former fighters was characterised by an identity crisis, but only to outline some presuppositions that could be helpful to understand the identity transformation. This sub-section gives a brief idea of the concept of identity crisis and relates it to the identity transformation process.

The evolution of the lives of the former fighters up to this point has been approached through an identity transformation process. This process has many similarities with identity formation theories. Erik Erikson (1968), a leading academic in the field of identity formation, was the first to use the term identity crisis to describe a period of internal analysis and exploration of the “self” during teenage years. During this period, the individual faces conflict between feelings of identity cohesion and role confusion. With the development of many studies in different fields, it is common knowledge now that an identity crisis can take place at any stage of life, when triggered by great transitions. It is also interesting to note that Erikson first considered the idea of identity crisis when dealing with identity loss among war trauma victims in the Second World War (Cote and Levin 2002: 15). He created the term “identity crisis” to express the symptoms of identity dissociation and identity confusion experienced by the “shell-shocked” war victims (Cote and Levin 2002: 95).

According to Erikson (1968) three elements must combine in identity development; if not, an identity crisis is recognisable. First, there is the development of a strong ego identity, the “self”, as part of the psychological dimension; secondly, the presence of a personality that characterises the individual as part of the personal dimension; and finally a recognised role in society as part of the social dimension. Accordingly, a deficiency in any of these factors may increase the chance of an identity crisis or confusion. “Such identity crisis is characterized by a subjective sense of identity confusion, a behavioural and characterological disarray, and a lack of commitment to recognised roles in a community” (Cote and Levine 2002: 15).

The hypothesis of this thesis is that all these elements are lacking or are not strongly recognisable in the former fighters after the conflict. First, the recognition of a strong ego identity and personality in the former fighter is clouded by the overwhelming existence of a powerful collective identity. Secondly, with the end of the conflict their role in society completely changes and becomes uncertain. The role of the individual in society represents an important part of the identity crisis. “In a social setting and communal life, role confusion is almost synonymous with identity confusion as identity, to a certain extent, is in alignment with the society and its expectations from the individual” (Bezci 2008: 4). In the case of the former fighters, the delegitimisation of their roles that took place with the disarmament and demobilisation process directly affected their identity. As Hazen (2007: 5) says: “This support network [war family] provides a sense of identity and purpose”, and the dissolution of this network provoked an identity confusion.

From another point of view, a development of Erikson’s studies by Cote and Levine (2002: 17) argues that integration into a stable society and culture leads to a stronger sense of identity in general. The presence of a structured society helps in the formation and maintenance of identity while a poorly-structured society makes this identity problematic. This is the case in war-torn Liberia where it is easy to understand why the former fighters experience identity problems.

Another aspect to take into consideration in this identity crisis is the antagonistic dualism between individual self and collective self. As mentioned above, the absence of two elements – ego and personality – can point to an identity crisis. Both these notions are linked to the individual self. During the war, the major trend among Liberians was the development of a strong sense of individualism. The

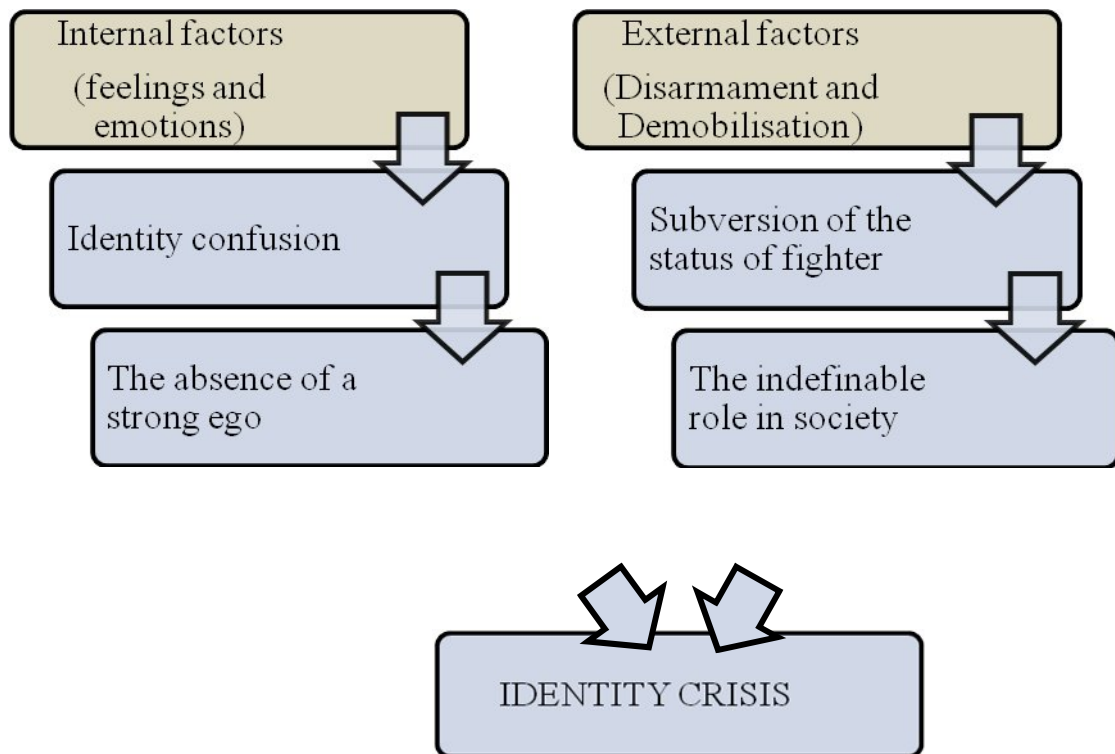
divisions created by the war did little to inspire their desire to belong to a wider community and accentuated the selfishness of the survival instinct. The widespread tendency was not to unify but to divide. These tendencies previously existed, especially in urban areas, but they were magnified by the war and the struggle for survival. It was not tension between ethnic or political groups that caused this; the constant, day-to-day struggle for survival meant that each individual was forced to fend for him or herself. Contrary to this trend, the soldiers tended to be united. The brotherhood developed during the conflict by many fighters was the foundation for strong bonds that survived after the end of the war. Camaraderie, solidarity, cohesion and so on are characteristics that usually develop among soldiers, generating a strong spirit of collectivism and sense of belonging. These aspects of the lives of the former fighters made them develop a strong primary identity based on a cooperative personality and collective self at the expense of the individual personality and the individual self.

In conclusion, the principal elements, analysed above, that indicate the presence of an identity crisis in the former fighters are:

- the absence of a strong ego due to identity confusion as a result of the shift from the collective to the individual self
- the indefinable role in society due to the complete subversion of the status of fighter in the social structure as a result of lack of integration.

While the first component was triggered by internal factors, such as common feelings and emotions, the second was provoked by external factors, such as the DD programmes (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Elements of the identity crisis



3.3 Conclusion

With the end of the war, the dissolution of the soldiers' status and the disintegration of their networks, the fighters found themselves in a traumatic state in which the whole range of their previously established relationships and bonds had been destroyed. The transformation of their web of connections that arose from the loss of their privileges led directly to a state of confusion.

While we can associate the disintegration of the status of fighter with the handing-over of weapons and the disintegration of the networks with demobilisation, it is not possible to link the beginning of this state of confusion to a particular moment in time. In any case, during their interviews, the former fighters refer to the period in the cantonments as a time of disorder. They were not referring to external chaos but to an internal development. They were used to giving orders and ruling among themselves, but suddenly were ruled and commanded by strangers. In the cantonments, the disruption to their natural order abruptly removed their familiar points of reference and cast them into a confused situation. The entire environment around them changed, and other internal changes were taking place as part of a full-scale transformation of society in Liberia.

Analysing this transformation of Liberian society, it is necessary to delineate the area of interest of the thesis. To outline the boundaries of this transformation, it is necessary to consider two factors: the war timeline and the sociological development of the lives of the former fighters. An important presupposition is that two particular events in history – the beginning of the war and its end – revolutionised the lives of Liberians in a radical way, leading to sociological transformations. When the war broke out, some Liberians continued to lead normal civilian lives, while others took part in the conflict. The main focus of this thesis is the end of the war, its aftermath, and the current situation of the former fighters.

Bearing this in mind, it is necessary to trace the war timeline to follow the development of the lives of the former fighters. If we see their lives before the war as “normal” – ordinary people living ordinary civilian lives – we can assume that they also had a “normal” status in society, being ranked in Liberian social hierarchy according to their occupation, education and income. Before the war there was nothing significant about their lives marking them out as different to any other member of the community. They were “invisible”, hidden among the people. They would have fulfilled their roles in the community, gaining the status of “normality” in their own eyes and in the eyes of others, in a normally functioning society.

This period of their lives ended as the war broke out. These once ordinary civilians were faced with a major turning point in their lives that would affect their self-image, how they saw themselves in society and how society perceived them. Their once “normal” or “civilian” selves were beginning to change gradually from what they were before or at the beginning of the conflict to what emerged at the end of the war.

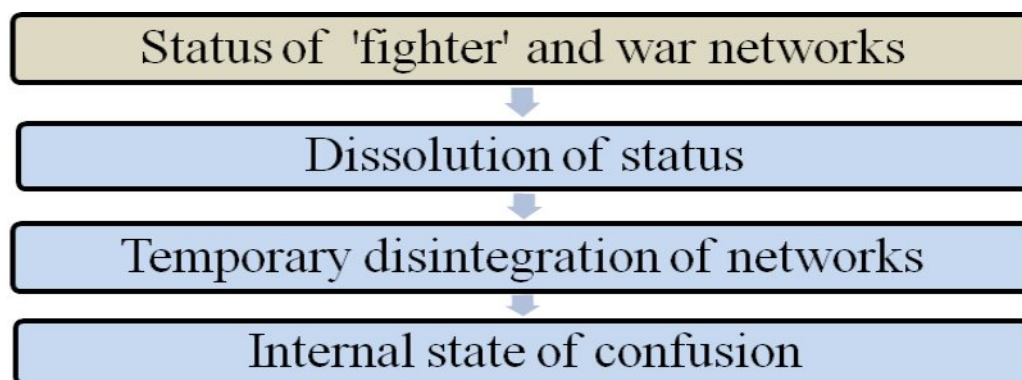
The second factor to consider when outlining the boundaries of the identity transformation of the former fighters is the societal development (relationships, social position, networks, beliefs) of their lives.

With the start of conflict, a civilian entering the war left behind his or her old status and acquired a new one, that of a fighter. This was the first significant event that began a transformation in their thinking and behaviour, and consequently in their identity. Those who decided to join the factions became alienated from their previous lives and ways of thinking. To survive in the new and unfamiliar order that had sprung up around them, they adjusted by adopting the role and status of soldier, and

consequently acquired a new identity. However, this adjustment soon fell apart in the anarchy that followed the end of the war. This not only marked a significant period of change in the fighter's life; it also brought about a new order in Liberian society, which severed any ties the fighter had with the past. Individuals who had mastered their new status as "fighter" were once again "levelled down" to the status of civilian, thus facing an internal state of confusion. This condition is the beginning of the identity transformation of the former fighter. The acquisition of a new status of "civilian" by the fighters determined how they began to see themselves, and influenced the new identity they formed around their new self-image.

These new circumstances erased the ex-combatants' previous connections and provoked them to occupy a new position in society. The full development process is illustrated in blue in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3: The sociological development of the lives of former fighters



The war timeline and the sociological development of the lives of the former fighters must be analysed together. Figure 3.4 is the matrix that results from combining Figures 3.2 and 3.3 and represents stages in the lives of the former fighters in relation to the war.

Figure 3.4: Matrix of war timeline and social development process


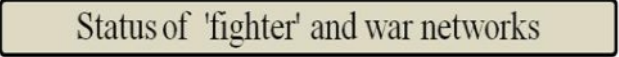

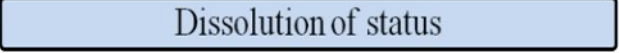
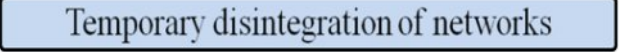
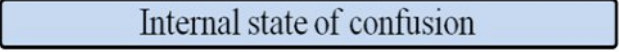
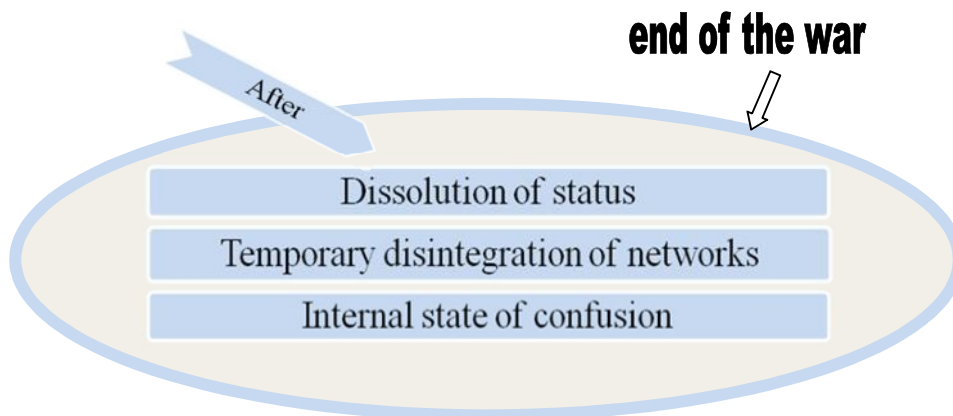
<i>Turning points</i>	<i>Chronology of events</i>	<i>Sociological development</i>
Beginning of conflict		
End of war		  

Figure 3.5 visually summarises the area of focus of this thesis regarding the identity transformation of former fighters. The circumference represents the end of the war. Inside this area, towards the end of the conflict the life of the fighters begins to change and be reshaped due to a sociological crisis. At the end of the war, they become estranged from their former lives and adopt new outlooks and ways of thinking. This came about especially for the fighters who distanced themselves from their families and communities.

Figure 3.5: Thesis focus area – the identity transformation of former fighters



The process of transformation of Liberian society started with the realisation that the circumstances of war were no longer the model for society. With the signing of the peace agreement, the leaders of the factions decided to end the war in order to bring stability and peace to Liberia. The importance of soldiers as an armed means of repression was no longer relevant as the conflict was taken from the level of “the field” to the political level. With the abolition of the status of soldier and the breakdown of the war networks, the web of connections around the fighters began to change accordingly.

Chapter 4: Reintegration process: Inclusion or exclusion from the community

4.1 Introduction

In line with the chronology of events, Chapter 4 is an analysis of the reintegration process that focuses on the perceptions of former fighters. This phase in the post-conflict setting deals with the inclusion of former fighter in the social and economic fabric of the country. This thesis approaches the conflict management mechanism of reintegration through the former fighter's perception of being accepted or rejected by society.

Kingma identifies three dimensions of reintegration: economic, social and psychological (Kingma 2000: 14). All three imply the concept of "community". While *economic* reintegration involves the re-establishment of the former fighters' livelihood, *social* reintegration is aimed at healing the fracture in relationships and trust between them and the communities. The *psychological* dimension concerns a series of mental and emotional perceptions that the former fighters experience during the process of reintegration. These three dimensions are the variables needed to achieve stability and development in post-conflict situations, which will determine the success or failure of reintegration. The first part of this chapter defines the social and psychological factors of reintegration.

It is necessary to bear in mind that a completely successful reintegration is unrealistic as there will always be a number of unsatisfied former fighters. Some of the major surveys by other authors into former fighters in Liberia highlight the fact that there is contrasting information about the success of reintegration. As Hill *et al.* (2008: 20–21) point out:

Using this benchmark, [referring to the question whether they face problem gaining acceptance from their family and community] clearly most ex-combatants have reintegrated successfully. There is, however, a minority – nearly 20% – that continue to have problems with some of the relationships in their lives. More than half of those respondents are having trouble getting along with both their families and their communities, a sign of serious trouble reintegrating socially ... Another proxy for reintegration success is whether or

not ex-combatants feel they are viewed positively by the community. This proxy taps into reintegration success for former fighters more generally and thus should be used as a complement to the more individual-specific questions above. The majority of respondents reported that they believe their home community's perception of them is neutral to positive: 43% of respondents feel that ex-combatants are viewed with acceptance, while 20% went so far as to say they are respected ... There is, however, some evidence of friction between ex-fighters and their communities. Negative responses, which skewed toward fear and distrust and away from anger and envy, accounted for about 35% of the sample. Based on these two proxies, we can conclude that though social reintegration has been successful for the majority of respondents, some problems remain.

The extract above expresses the ambiguity of former fighters' perceptions about reintegration. During some conversations conducted for this research, the participants asserted that they felt reintegrated. However, during further discussions they described problems about getting along with their families and communities, because they were viewed with fear and distrust. This is often the case with former fighters who feel excluded from the social fabric. Peter says:

[...] the society still sees us as bad people. I feel marginalised because everywhere I go looking for work I cannot find anything besides being secure and to stay in the cold where the mosquitoes bites at night. Nobody wants to give us good job. (Peter 2006, pers. comm., 20 September)

This comment highlights the gap between former fighters and the community, and indicates that the success or failure of reintegration can be measured by the extent of inclusion. This approach rejects the idea of the reintegration programmes in Liberia that seemed to treat former fighters as single entities that could be inserted willingly or by force into communities whose members were at times far more developed and skilled than the former fighters. However, the Liberian case proves that both the communities and the former fighters themselves are responsible for ensuring the proper recognition of each other's identity.

According to Jennings (2008b: 336), reintegration is more suitable when civilians and former fighters are seen as being at the same level. In the case of Liberia, the stigmatisation problem arises at a group rather than individual level:

... the presumed stigmatization of ex-combatants seemed overstated; among our informants, nearly 70 percent lived with family or close relatives, indicating that family were not reluctant to take them back, and Pugel reports that 94 percent of ex-combatants (both DDR participants and nonparticipants) self-reported having no problems gaining acceptance from their neighbours. This arguably owes to the duration and encompassing nature of the conflict, as well as to the various means of recruitment into armed groups. Some informants claimed they were forcibly recruited, but most said they fought to protect their own or their family's security: they figured they were safer on the inside than the outside and could use their insider status to extend some protection to their family. Even non combatants seemed to recognise this logic and acknowledge that people did what they must to survive.

She further explains that

“this does not imply forgiveness, but it does indicate acceptance of the post war landscape in a society where all were affected by, and many directly or indirectly implicated in, conflict. Insofar as a stigma did operate, it was seemingly on a group rather than individual level.” (Jennings 2008b: 336)

Conducting a collective rather than individual analysis of former fighters provides the answer to understanding why there is a gap between them and the rest of the population. The self-categorisation into a group explains the in-group/out-group mechanism of the feeling of acceptance/rejection by the community. The group of former fighters does not have boundaries in terms of numbers and geographical location. They merely present common characteristics that can come to the surface in different ways and create different personalities. Although people with different backgrounds seem to have little in common from the outset, they can have some common traits linking them together.

4.2 Reintegration as a community-driven inclusion process

Reintegration is commonly understood as:

the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a

country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance. (United Nations 2006: 2)

In order to carry out this process the reintegration programmes are seen as “assistance measures provided to former combatants that would increase the potential for them and their families’ economic and social reintegration into civil society (DPKO 2000: 15). Such “assistance measures” in Liberia have been associated only with economic procedures, leaving no other choice but for the international community and academics to use these procedures as the variable for measuring the success of the reinsertion process. This approach drastically marked the reintegration process in post-conflict Liberia. The social and psychological connotations of reintegration are overlooked since employment opportunities are seen as the only sign of successful reintegration. In addition, from the point of view of the community and the former fighters, the word “reintegration” became synonymous with education and vocational training for the purpose of work reinsertion.

Economic reintegration was the focus of the programme as social reintegration was largely left aside. The assumption that economic reintegration in turn leads to social reintegration does not hold true. The lack of attention to the social dimension, in particular as regards both to reconciliation and psycho-social support, was a major gap. (UNDP 2006: 10)

From this section of the UNDP final report on the reintegration process in Liberia, it is clear that the approach to the social situation was weak, while most of the planned psycho-social support and counselling was cancelled.

Concerning the psychological reintegration aspect of the programmes, a study by Gear in 2002 emphasised the importance of psychological assistance for the recovery of the former fighters. Mogapi (2004: 224) highlights the importance of involving the former fighters in the community, for example by organising “ceremonies that recognize and honour ex-combatants, to be held at local level, with the communities actively involved in the process. This will assist in restoring the dignity that these soldiers need and also enabling the community to learn about the sacrifices that they have made.” Continued community efforts could help build the self-esteem of the former fighters and help their self-identification as members of society.

The notion of community is central to the psychological aspects of reintegration. The idea of community is often associated with acceptance and rejection. Redfield (1960) points to the community as having qualities such as distinctiveness, smallness and homogeneity, and as providing self-sufficiency – all idiosyncratic characteristics of the delimitation process of the community. Others refer to the community as a process or system: “The community should be viewed as a process involving social structure and cultural behaviour” (Arensberg and Kimball 1965: 2–3). Either you are in or you are out. Important studies by Cohen (1998) and Bray (2004) focus on the boundaries that are used for the purposes of identification. They analyse identity as a “virtual site” where the boundaries provide the framework within which this virtual site is built. All the above concepts relating to borders, boundaries and delimitations of the community affect the concept of inclusion and exclusion by society. When borders are defined, there is an automatic definition of who is inside and who is outside. This creates space for the acceptance or rejection of an individual. Consequently, the notion of community is central when talking about the reintegration of former fighters. This assumes that the former combatants need and warrant support within the community or society into which they are being reintegrated.

This support given by the community to former fighters can vary: socio-economic, developmental, security-based, humanitarian-based etc. This further involves the notion that former fighters are different from the masses or civilians in terms of what constitutes their personality or identity, or in terms of their abilities, potential to progress etc. This approach or assumption, as shown in the Liberian case, intensifies and widens the gap between former fighters and the communities into which they are reintegrated. More often than not, when communities feel that the former fighters are not necessarily part of their community, or have a negative view of their contribution and existence within the community, it is usually because the aforementioned approach has created and/or sustained such a perception.

This detachment between former fighters and the communities began with the delay at the beginning of the reintegration process. By the time reintegration started, local populations had already begun a process of socio-economic reconstruction. As soon as there was a sense of security, residents and those who had returned to the community earlier began the difficult task of rebuilding relationships, traditional

institutions and the local economy, as well as addressing the trauma resulting from the conflict. During this community-driven reconstruction process, the former fighters were still going through their disarmament and demobilisation programmes and so did not benefit from all the positive effects of this community effort. Moreover, the former fighters are often seen as “privileged” beneficiaries of the reconstruction process. Too often, the focus on former fighters has overshadowed this community-driven reconstruction process, thus hindering stakeholders from tapping into the potential within communities. It seems obvious that a socio-economic reintegration process is flawed if it fails to look at community and wider stakeholder groups and their needs.

During the period of change and insertion into the community, new questions arise over disorientation, a dependency bred in military structures, alienation, and stigmatization. This period of personal change requires socio-psychological attention (Berdal 1996: 17). Effective integration is not just about being economically or physically part of community, but relies on social acceptance generated by the bonds of interpersonal relationships.

4.2.1 A first-hand account of reintegration in Liberia

Before defining the sociological implications of the meaning of reintegration, let us look at the UN peacekeeping programmes run in Liberia, particularly during the DD phase. Immediately after disarming, former fighters received a DDR recognition card, were temporarily accommodated in cantonments, received the first of the two instalments of US\$150 each (one instalment was paid at the cantonment – the other followed three months later when the former fighter had transferred to his resident community), and were allowed to enter the reintegration programme, which consisted of formal education, apprenticeships, and vocational training in public works, farming, livestock, or fishing services. Individuals signed up in reintegration plans were to get a monthly stipend whilst engaging and getting their education or coaching fees paid for, for up to three years. Numerous additional DDR individuals sought resettlement in the Montserrado region outside Monrovia as opposed to elsewhere. This might be seen in the light of Kees Kingma’s observation that reintegration is frequently less productive in cities in comparison to countryside locations (Jennings 2008b: 329).

As mentioned earlier, a crucial element of the Liberian experience was the reduction of entry requirements during the December 2003–April 2004 hiatus; initially requiring production of a weapon, the recommenced DD process only required applicants to produce 150 rounds of ammunition.

This change led to an explosion in the overall number of DDR applicants, while reducing the number of weapons gathered. Consequently, by the conclusion of the DD segments, 102,193 participants were catalogued as neutralised (as opposed to the previous total of 38,000 to 45,000 former fighters); however, only about 27,800 weapons and six million rounds of ammunition were stockpiled (UNDP 2006). This raises a question as to the extent to which the security goals of disarmament had been realised. Certainly, stories and reports of large armament caches continue to surface, giving rise to suspicions of widespread security breaches. There is also apparent confirmation that many of the DDR applicants were not in fact former fighters (Jennings 2008b: 330).

These security concerns brought back the ghost of the demobilisation after the end of the first civil war in Liberia. After that conflict, further clashes and conflicts were to be expected, not only because the overall peacekeeping process and strategies were ineffective, but also because their execution was poor. Kieh (2009) argues that the primary failure point in the peacekeeping process was not just the weak ideas and strategies behind it, but a failure to initiate crucial elements such as reform of the security sector and encouragement of national understanding and settlement. This failure was compounded by the attempt to complete too quickly the procedures of disarmament and demobilisation, which ultimately were inefficient and inappropriate. For these reasons, further conflict could be expected in Liberia, Kieh points out. To avoid this, it was necessary for the government and national parties to learn from their mistakes and be better prepared in the future (Kieh 2009: 7).

The second civil war confirmed this analysis, and the post-conflict process after this war reproduced some of the problems that caused the failure first time round. One of these failures was in the methods of carrying out the DD phase.

As the basis for the transition of the former fighters from martial to civilian status, the DD phase represents an essential aspect of my research. What happened during this stage of the transition from war to peace in Liberia is of pivotal relevance in understanding how the web of connections of former fighters was affected by the

DDR process. The Liberian DD programme is characterised by a number of unexpected problems. By and large these problems appear to have resulted from inadequate preparation, due especially to political pressures.

During my first visit to Liberia I interviewed some of the main actors in the DD phase of the programme. The general intention of these interviews was to listen to those who had helped to shape the policies of the entire process so as to collect information on the development of the programme. The main authority in the DD process was the programme and policy advisor, Mr Charles Achodo, head of the JIU (Joint Implementation Unit), who provided deep insights. It was clear from the beginning that the personnel responsible for the programme were not fully satisfied with the current security situation of the former fighters; he made clear that some of the problems that emerged during the DD programme were political. Comparing the two operations in West Africa, Mr Achodo pointed out how the main problem during the DD stage related to the legitimacy of the government.

The Sierra Leone and the Liberian conflict are in a context of failed states, but the differences are that in Sierra Leone there was an elected government with an international committee there to ensure its legitimacy. Liberia, instead, never had an elected government and the government has never been legitimated internationally but had a little local legitimacy that didn't assure the complete control over the country. (Achodo 2005, interview, 5 October)

Mr Steve Ursino, country representative for UNDP, also pointed to the political instability of Liberia as a factor in the initial failures of the DD phase.

Both DDR programmes in the two countries were the result of a negotiated peace agreement and after a one-to-one talk there was a decision for deployment. But while in the case of Sierra Leone the process of conflict resolution involves negotiated political commitments and an arrangement that includes the factions in the political development, in Liberia, on the contrary, the peace agreements of Accra only provided a transitional internship. (Ursino 2005, interview, 7 October).

Mr Sergio Valdini, head of the DEX (Direct Execution) unit of the JIU, was of the same opinion, and added:

Because there was a government in Sierra Leone some legitimacy was already in place and the government guided the process, calling the international committee to support and implement it and to control that all the

steps made were neutral. In Liberia, because there is a transitional government, made of the factions of the conflict, it didn't have the essential political wheel to drive the programme and therefore demanded the United Nations to lead it. (Valdini 2005, interview, 13 October)

It was thus a common opinion that the absence of legitimacy of the transitional government and its lack of participation in the process led to malfunctions that slowed down the DD programme and, in some cases, brought it to a halt. Indeed it is clear that, if the previously warring factions are not involved in the reconstruction process, they can decide to stop the process and to boycott the whole operation, or even to go back to war. Even if part three of the Liberian Peace Agreement established an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR) to coordinate DDRR activities, there were no specifications in the agreement on what the responsibilities of this group were on the issue of reintegration. This lack of legitimacy and responsibility concerning policies accentuated the gap between high-ranking officers and common soldiers. Those who attained good positions in the post-conflict setting felt no accountability towards their former companions and did not care about them. On the one hand, the demobilisation successfully broke the chain of command; on the other, individuality prevailed over collaboration. These circumstances helped to develop in some former fighters a sense of betrayal (this will be examined in the next chapter of this thesis).

The interviews with the main actors of the DD process indicate that the focal problem during this phase was the politicisation of the process. It is also clear that the main problem noticed by the NGOs involved in the implementation process was pressure to speed up the programme. Another significant issue that affected the effective implementation of the DD programme is that the time frame for the political agenda was out of sync with the time frame for the necessary technical support structures being in place. The latter were neglected in favour of speed with an eye on a donors' conference scheduled for December 2003. Political and economic pressures led to unrealistic timetables being set. The three NGO directors who organised and directed the establishment of the six cantonment sites for the disarmament and demobilisation of the former combatants, in Tubmanburg, Buchanan, VOA (Voice of America), Gbarnga, Zwedru and Ganta, were in agreement with this criticism.

Mr Charles Pitchford, director of the Lutheran World Federation-World Service (LWF-WS) said that “the politics threatened the whole process by trying to speed it up, because the resources and the people needed for the cantonments were not ready”. Mr John Di Stefano, head of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), strongly disapproved of the timetable that the UN drew up, claiming that it had been aimed at giving a good impression to the public. He added: “We reminded them during the meetings that we were not ready for the opening of the cantonments, but nobody listened to us and the only answer was that we ought to be ready according to the programme”.

Some key issues may be highlighted in these interviews. Firstly, the DD phase should not be used to apply political pressure – if there are political disagreements, they should be solved politically. Secondly, issues concerning ministers, army, police and so on must not be inserted in the peace agreement as preconditions for disarmament; if they are, misunderstandings will arise during the disarmament phase.

Another common opinion is that it was misguided to accelerate the process out of fear of a new outburst of fighting, and that this led to the dramatic failure at Camp Schiefflin and the death of nine people. The process should only have started after it had been fully prepared operationally; resources had to be ready; it was necessary in advance to recruit the required experts, to find the right people and equipment, to organise the necessary funds, and so on. In addition, UN troops were not fully deployed on the ground because the timetable did not foresee that, when the military component was composed of soldiers of various nations, it would be almost impossible to deploy them all at the same time; it was thus impracticable to attain full military strength when required.

On the other hand, all the people I interviewed agreed about the successes of this first phase of the DDRR programme. An agreement between the factions was reached and implemented, and the circumstances for peace were created. Peace had been more or less achieved, IDPs had returned to their counties, refugees were back in Liberia, there was a new elected government after free and fair elections, and people were not afraid to go into the streets. New small businesses had appeared and children started to go back to school. The possibility of new democratic activities had been created, providing a stable foundation for the establishment of a reliable government.

4.2.2 The social and psychological implications of reintegration

The reintegration programmes in Liberia mostly consisted of the reinsertion of former soldiers into the economic marketplace through vocational training, apprenticeships, formal education and micro-initiatives and enterprises. Analysis of the implementation of these programmes in Liberia shows that not much time was dedicated to social and psychological factors of the problem.

Figures available from the DDR programmes show that the programme was designed to receive an estimated 38,000 combatants, which corresponds to what the factions declared during the negotiating phase. During disarmament and demobilisation, however, 103,000 fighters, almost three times the estimated number, were received by the cantonments. This complicated and slowed down the process considerably, almost leading to a breakdown in the programme. Cuts were made both in costs and timing in some elements of the programme, leading to reduced attention being given to psychological and social factors.

The reduction in time spent at the cantonment sites, for example, affected in particular the extent of counselling, which is a central part of psychological reintegration. The period for disarmament and demobilisation was originally estimated at one month but was effectively reduced to less than 10 days, leaving inadequate time for counselling.

The overcrowding and the financial cuts also affected the implementation framework that, according to the plans, was to focus on the entire war-affected population, including former fighters, returned refugees, returned IDPs, and the communities that received these groups. However, the large number of fighters taking part in the programmes left insufficient space for attention to be given to the other vulnerable categories. This situation was one of the causes of disagreement between civilians and former soldiers, and of the sense of resentment that the communities felt towards the ex-fighters. In some cases not all the former fighters participated in the reintegration programmes due to the shortage of funds. In other cases former fighters started the programmes but did not receive the allowances promised, or the payments ceased after a short period.

In 2004, UN troops entered and took us to the camp and gave us US\$150 each for our arms. We decided to cease fire because the rebels had support. I went through the disarmament and demobilisation and I have my ID card.

After disarmament, I went back to school. I took my money from disarmament, rented a room to live, bought food, clothes, shoes and helped my family. I got enrolled in school but they stopped to receive the fee so I got kicked out. I never applied to another institution because the people said the money was not enough to send us to another learning institution (Michael 2009, pers. comm., 17 May).

This is echoed by Andy, who says: “I have ceased formal education due to a shortage of funds. Each time we attended school we were supposed to get benefits. When we received our cheques we were unable to cash them” (Andy 2006, pers. comm., 3 August).

An analysis reveals why some of the soldiers at the time of disarmament decided not to take part in the programmes, in order to avoid being stigmatised as former fighters; avoiding this was an essential part of their psychological reintegration. During the interviews, Chief Papa was questioned on how he sought to avoid being stigmatised as an ex-combatant. He answered:

I did this by not going through the DDRR programme. Because having an ex-comb. ID card cannot separate me from a combatant. To act in an orderly manner, to be very serviceable to people in the community, most of all, not to act traumatised. (Chief Papa 2005, pers. comm., 27 October)

His response echoes that of many others; some decided to participate in the DD stage to get the first part of the allowance but avoided going through the RR phase. Another former fighter, Roosevelt said:

I never went through the DDR because it would have damaged my character ‘cause I wanted to travel. Not all of us were illiterate and I have my parents to support me in furtherance of my education. Being a DDR student can associate me from the title ex-comb. (Roosevelt 2006, pers. comm., 24 September)

Certain authors have expressed a similar point, such as Pugel (2007: 5):

Formal identification as an ex-combatant was the reason most often cited by nonparticipants (47%) for declining entry into the DDRR programme. Whether the decision of the non-participants was due to a general social stigma or the result of individual conduct cannot be explained here.

The decision was taken in order to avoid being identified as former fighters, exploiting the resources for reintegration, and therefore highlighting the division between civilians and fighters. One of the major assumptions that exist in the Liberian post-war system that directly affects the reintegration process of former fighters is the appropriateness of the specific policies for the equal treatment of fighters and civilians. This assumption is multifaceted and hence a number of different factors can influence the overall success or failure of the whole reintegration process. For instance, the main facet of this assumption is the ability of the practitioners to select the correct individuals for the programmes. This indicates that the division between civilians and former fighters is clear-cut and that they can be divided easily based on status before and after the war/conflict. However, researchers agree that in Liberia the division was not at all clear-cut.

The case of Jeoffrey clearly illustrates this lack of clear division between victim and perpetrators:

“I join the war after the rebels kill my family. I was conscripted by the rebels, they tied me beat me then they killed my mother and brother so I decided to join government to revenge ‘cause they starved me and putted me in pain”
(Jeoffrey 2006, pers. comm.)

The number of fighting forces and the extensive length of the war gave birth to numerous situations such as that of Jeoffrey, where individuals shifted from the status of non-combatant to that of combatant or from one warring faction to another. Sometimes people took up weapons to defend themselves, their families or their possessions, fighting against whoever tried to cross their path, no matter which factions they were. This made it very difficult to differentiate between non-combatants and fighters. After recent conflicts, especially those involving the conscription of youth and repeated waves of violence, it was difficult for practitioners to categorise those involved in and affected by the conflict. Take, for example, an individual who was tortured and kidnapped during one phase of conflict, was later forced to fight, and then eventually had to find shelter in a neighbouring country at another stage of the war. What is the most appropriate group to place him in? Is he a refugee, a victim of torture or a former fighter?

The official criterion used by the United Nations to classify a war-affected person in the category of former fighter has been the ID card given after the handover

of a gun. Moreover, during the DD phase in Liberia, the standard method of categorisation of fighters was based only on the possession or non-possession of a weapon. If someone owned or was in possession of arms during the disarmament process, he would automatically be included in the category of former fighter and would benefit from this status. The question that arises where there is a standardised method is how to deal with the reality of the particular context of a specific country, such as Liberia. Those who have worked in the field in Liberia have learnt to call those who were affected at any stage by the war a “survivor” or “war-affected”. The eventual location of an individual will be in a predetermined, often inappropriate unit that, in some cases, accentuates the stigmatisation and marginalisation of the individual.

Reintegration programmes were originally intended to be the tool to deal with recovery, with the aim of ensuring equal political, social and economic opportunities for war-affected populations and the receiving communities, and as a way of avoiding the exclusion of vulnerable groups. However, in some cases, the deficiencies had the opposite effect and stopped or slowed down the complete social integration of former fighters.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has played an important role in social and psychological reintegration. Within the much-disputed topic of the reintegration of former fighters, the human rights issue is a focal point of disagreement. On the one hand, there are those who support the right of civilians to protection from crimes such as murder, massacre, torture and rape and who seek the prosecution of the perpetrators. On the other, there are those who emphasise the right of the former fighters to be rehabilitated and reintegrated into the social fabric of a new post-conflict transition, where non-discrimination is the basis for total reconciliation. In the middle of the debate is the TRC, which aims to investigate and provide an accurate analysis of the violence committed during conflict. In the tragic context of Liberia, where conflicts have left a deep split in society, the scales are tipped in favour of one side or the other, trying to find a common ground for both victims and perpetrators of past abuses. It is, indeed, only in an environment where human rights are upheld that long-term peace, dignity and stability can proliferate and reconciliation among the survivors is feasible. An important role in the psychological

integration of former fighters was supposed to be played by the TRC, but this mechanism was never completely implemented.

The TRC was designed to become a powerful tool for Liberians to make a collective effort to understand the effect of war on former fighters as well as eradicating the mythology and disgrace that surrounded the trauma experienced by them. However, in practice, most of the TRC sessions seemed to exclude the true and/or traumatic war memories of the ex-soldiers. A similar experience can be found in the case of South African. According to what Mogapi (2004) wrote about the South African experience of its own TRC, there also seemed to be little or no discussion of the traumatic war experiences of ex-fighters. Instead, the same kind of evasion is apparent, as most of the former soldiers kept their emotions bottled up instead of using the TRC as a platform to vent their frustrations, anger and worries about their experiences.

Mogapi (2004: 222) writes:

South Africans still don't understand the pain and impact of war on the soldiers. As a result, war experiences and soldiers are still mystified and stigmatized. And although South Africa has become more empathic and understanding towards victims of trauma, such as abused children and women, there seems to be a deafening silence about the trauma of war. This silence contributes to the perpetuation of myths and the stigmatization of ex-combatants ... as a result there has been a lack of advocacy in the country on the traumatic experiences of soldiers. The lack of preparation also meant that mental health professionals lack the specialized skills needed to work with this group, resulting in compromised services offered to ex-combatants.

The failure of the TRC and such organisations in Liberia is a huge setback for the social and psychological reintegration of former fighters. As has been said earlier, suppressing one's experiences and emotions about war does not help in overcoming one's difficulties and being able to contribute to the community or being accepted and approved by it.

Understanding former fighters' memories after the war is an important part of the reintegration process. As it is difficult for the families and friends of those once close to the former fighters to understand their experiences, their input into the role of the various reintegration programmes is pivotal for their development. As those once

close to the soldiers often do not know how to cope with them in the new situation, these programmes help them to deal with their memories and experiences, so that they will not repress them, which would hinder their future development. Roosevelt, a former fighter who underwent some trauma counselling during his reintegration programme, said:

I feel very bad about my past. Things we were forced to do still rotate in my mind. However I feel good of my present, because I have the chance to live a normal life. And comparing the past to the present, the present is fruitful and hopeful for me because everything I do is done by my own choice, not forcefully. I completely regret the past but the present gives me strength to go on. (Roosevelt 2006, pers. comm., 24 September)

He speaks freely about his actions while fighting at the border with Guinea. He said that it was normal to take “other people’s things, many jewellery and women and killing innocent people”. He adds:

I regret because of the bad, evil acts like killing of people with saw [power saw], raping, and beating but I was forced to carry out commands. They ordered you to do things against your will. But now I feel like normal, a citizen with my way and habit like playing with babies. Sometimes in a push or argument I am referred to as old rebel, a killer but it is only said out of anger. They can hurt my feelings, but I understand that it is true, at being rebel, those are your attributes. But me being detraumatized I know and understand that staying calm and un-anger it will gradually go away one day. (Roosevelt 2006, pers. comm., 24 September)

Regarding the need to take into consideration these traumatic experiences and memories, Mogapi remarks:

studies have shown that the attempt by society and soldiers to banish war memories is detrimental to the healing of ex-combatants. The greatest psychological distress of soldiers is related more to the attempt by society and the soldiers themselves to wipe out these memories than to the memories themselves. (Mogapi, 2004: 222)

In his study Mogapi (2004) points out the most stressful process in the clinical trials for former fighters to learn how to deal with traumatic experiences in the war:

...during the war the soldiers were trained to remain calm even in midst of events that would naturally evoke strong reactions. There was no time to grieve for a lost friend or process a painful memory. As a result, many experiences of war remained unprocessed in the psyche of the soldiers. (Mogapi, 2004: 223)

Mogapi (2004) says that the post-war situation and the repressed emotions of former fighters hindered their overall development in the workplace and in education programmes, making it more difficult for them to feel a sense of belonging. Not being able to speak about their war emotions or experiences meant that former fighters remained alienated and thus less able to become valuable members of the community or see themselves as active contributing members of a normal functioning society.

According to Mogapi (2004) the former fighters felt alienated from their families, friends and communities, and the reconstruction process could be hindered if family and friends did not know how to cope with this. This is not a new problem and has been witnessed since the first investigations on war trauma. One of the first examples is a study dealing with World War I, where Rivers (1918) writes that former fighters were expected to resume normal life and disregard their war experiences; that, while recovering in hospitals and in therapy, they were told by doctors and therapists “they should endeavour to banish all thoughts of war from their mind” (Rivers 1918). Trying to deal with the experiences of war and return to normal life while repressing their memories accentuated the former fighters’ state of confusion. According to Mogapi (2004), these negative feelings would affect their overall social stature and in turn the process of reconstruction. Whether or not they were being accepted by the community may be seen as somewhat irrelevant, as their confused state clouded their judgment and left them feeling depressed, lonely and isolated. In this negative state they also perceived that they were not accepted by the community. Rivers (1918) writes that successful reintegration into the community can take place after the proper psychological and emotional care of a former fighter. This has proved to be the most successful approach in the past (Mogapi 2004).

4.2.3 The role of community acceptance and approval in effective reintegration

Effective social integration means that the former fighter is homogenised and takes on a civilian identity, breaking any links with the past. This occurs when they leave

behind the status of former fighter and are no longer associated with war. The aim of effective social and psychological reintegration is that the former fighter can live as a normal active member of the community and even, in some cases, achieve complete immersion in the community. Hence one of the few ways of measuring the success of reintegration is to determine if the former fighters see themselves as being accepted and approved by the community.

While the level of social reintegration can be measured by this sense of acceptance by the community, psychological reintegration is an expression of a series of mental and emotional perceptions experienced by the former fighters, which requires more in-depth analysis. In other words, the level of social and psychological reintegration can only be measured by analysing the complete sphere of feelings and reactions experienced by the former fighters towards the community. Perceptions analysed in the previous chapter such as a sense of betrayal and abandonment, feeling excluded, loneliness and discrimination generate reactions such as depression and low self-esteem.

So far, the expression *reintegration* of former fighters has been used to refer to a complicated process beginning at the end of the war and aimed at reinserting the former fighters into the community. The level of acceptance by the community measures the social inclusion or exclusion of the former fighter. According to some surveys, a high percentage of ex-soldiers did not experience any problems being accepted back into the communities (Pugel 2007; Bøas and Hatløy 2008; Hill et al. 2008), but what does acceptance mean for them? The concept of acceptance is often misunderstood and needs to be analysed in order to establish if an individual is truly included in or excluded from social life.

As an explanation for this ambiguous situation, we must recall the meaning of some terms. Acceptance, for most former fighters, has a *practical* meaning: to be integrated means not to be rejected or expelled by the community. Being accepted mostly means: “I can live there and no-one can send me away” (Michael 2009, pers. comm., 17 May). Michael, a former fighter who feels he is part of the community and reintegrated, said when asked about his life:

I came in Monrovia the year 2006 because life in Ganta was not to compare to life in Monrovia. Education is not right in Ganta. After the war, I decided to go to school and learn so my brother [cousin] was the one who brought me

and I came with the intention to go to school but, when there was no money, I decided to get on motor bike and ride. Ganta is much better than Monrovia 'cause everything is cheaper. The only thing missing in Ganta is education. Everybody struggle for themselves. I sold the bike because it became very old and cannot work. My uncle bought me another bike of which I have right now. (Michael 2009, pers. comm., 17 May)

Michael, who is recognised in his community as a former fighter, lives with his cousin and uncle, who did not fight during the war. The subjects of his conversations are similar to those of many other youths in Liberia – education and money. He could be just another average youth, but the community see him differently. During the interview he says that, although he feels part of the community, he also feels their disapproval.

This falls far short of effective reintegration. Former fighters often feel that they are received into the communities with fear, resentment and apprehension. Charles is a 27-year-old who fought with LURD from 1999. He apparently leads a normal life, is managing “small, small” (a Liberian expression that means “quite well”) and is running a video club in Duala, Bushrod Island. Charles’s story is similar to that of hundreds of former fighters in Liberia. He is originally from Kolahun in Lofa County where he joined the forces voluntarily

...because they told us in Lofa that Mr Taylor was treating our people bad. So anyone who was brave should join and, when we kill Mr Taylor, we were to be given plenty of money. (Charles 2009, pers. comm., 9 May)

Charles claimed to have a security reason for joining the forces – that the government was not treating all Liberians equally but was giving preferential treatment to the group supporting the newly elected president, Charles Taylor. He had undergone formal education and continued to live a normal life even after the war: “Before the war I was a six-grade student and right now I am a 10th-grade student” (Charles 2009, pers. comm., 9 May). Charles feels completely reintegrated into his community, claiming that many neighbours enjoy watching shows and films at his video club. However, despite his “normal” life, when asked about how the community perceive him, he remarks: “I think they see us as bad people. But to tell us in the faces is what had no happened. [They tell us directly it never happened] Maybe they feel the war is

not over completely yet” (Charles 2009, pers. comm., 9 May). This clarifies the extent to which he is seen as different by the other civilians.

Love fought in the same community where she lives now, in St Paul Bridge in Monrovia. In her conversation she speaks about her return to Klay in Bomi County. She says she had no problem in gaining acceptance from her family and community: “No problem. In fact my people were happy to see me alive, but people can be looking at me” (Love 2009, pers. comm., 9 May). She has become accepted, but people nevertheless see her differently: “They see me as a former fighter” (Love 2009, pers. comm., 9 May). She concluded that, even if the community accepted the former fighters, most of the time approval was lacking.

Asked if he faced any problem with the community, Dell said “No, not at all”, but later in the conversation added: “Well, I think so [I feel problems of acceptance] because there are not many people that are friendly with me. Maybe they are afraid of me being an ex-combatant” (Dell 2009, pers. comm., 18 May). This again supports the idea of former fighters being accepted only because members of the community fear them, and not because they approve of them as active members of the community.

Other findings from these conversations show that the majority of respondents do not have integration problems with families, neighbours and communities, but that they perceive problems over approval. When asked what were their perceptions of their status, the majority said they were seen as rebels, bad people, and fighters; showing that inclusion was far from being realised. In some cases former fighters are perceived as a liability. The only reason for accepting them is the fear of an outbreak of hostilities in the future and because it is always better to be allies rather than enemies. This is the case with John, a 29-year-old former fighter from Pleebo in Maryland County. John fought for the NPFL but is now selling fish at the local market in West Point, and trying to save money to buy a motorbike, to operate as a taxi:

I joined the second day the freedom fighters entered Pleebo, I think it was in October 1990. In the forces I was having two ranks. In the ATU [Anti Terrorists Unit] I was Sergeant but on the front line, I was a General since I enjoyed the General rank, so they called me General. I did not participate to the RR programmes because when I gave my gun and they gave me my money, I ran away and came to West Point. I don't think I have family

anywhere. Since I left Pleebo, went to Gbarnga and now to West Point here, I have not seen family because I left them back and I don't know where to find them. (John 2009, pers. comm., 19 May)

When asked if he found problems of acceptance in his community, he answered:

No, because plenty of us who live here in West Point are former fighters. In fact when some people hear my name they want be friendly with me. Maybe they are doing it so when something bad happens and I see them I will remember them as friends and will not harm them. But I see myself as a good man, in fact I have not been to a police station for questioning whatsoever. I see myself as a changed person and a good man. I told you when we started, that I am selling fish and will soon buy myself a motor bike to run it. (John 2009, pers. comm., 19 May)

Asked how the community saw him, he added:

Well, until someone identifies me as former General, I can go to any community, no one will have problem with me. But generally, the communities will see the ex-combatants as bad people. (John 2009, pers. comm., 19 May)

The data from these conversations reflects the figures in Pugel's larger-scale survey (Pugel 2007) in which the statistics show indisputably that former soldiers felt that their reception by the communities and their families was strong, but that there was not much trust. The Pugel survey (2007: 5) shows that 44% of former fighters perceive that the community looks upon them with fear or distrust:

When the sample of ex-combatants was asked to indicate how they believed the community viewed the population of ex-combatants, only 66% believed that acceptance was the norm. While programme completers perceive acceptance from the community at a higher rate than the non-participants (62% vs. 44%), they also are doubly disposed to perceive that the community lives in fear of the ex-combatants (20% vs. 10%).

The figures above show two different sides of the same concept. When answering questions about acceptance, former fighters said they felt accepted, but on further investigation expressed their frustration with being seen as "rebels" or "bad" people. The responses given are contradictory, showing that the former fighters are not always

clear whether or not they are being accepted, but their general perception is that the community does not trust or approve of them.

This sense of disapproval from the community comes from their perception of the failure of the reintegration process to eliminate the gap between former fighters and civilians. Those labelled as “ex-combatants” will potentially isolate themselves from society as they perceive a low level of approval by the community. This is also a consequence of feelings such as a sense of betrayal and abandonment, no sense of belonging, loneliness and discrimination (discussed in the previous chapter). Some former fighters never experienced these feelings – or, if they did, for just a brief period after the DD process – and are reintegrated into society. For other ex-combatants, however, these feelings have a more permanent effect on their lives, and are associated with depression and low self-esteem, which damage their social lives.

Psychological feelings and social reactions are a central component of the debate about effective reintegration. It is clear that “Ex-combatants frequently experience mental health problems at much higher rates than civilians, although some forms of modern warfare also expose great numbers of civilians to traumatic experiences” (MDRP 2007: no page).

Many studies conducted in Liberia investigate trauma and mental health problems such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Asher *et al.* 2008; Abramowitz 2010; Gregory and Embrey 2009). This thesis considers just some aspects of the psychological state of former fighters, such as low self-esteem and depression, from the point of view of the effect on their social relationships, such as isolation and separation from the community.

The transition period after the DD phase is associated with many factors that can contribute to depression (Parker *et al.* 2002). Social interactions and the state of society after the war contributed to depression among former fighters. Ruiz (1992) talks about the social stress model, writing that the symptoms of stress and depression are due to social problems and result in a change in the social status of the individual – in this case, former fighters after the DD phase. According to Ruiz (1992) some of the most common characteristics of this depression are:

Disconnection or divorce

Aggression and physical mistreatment

Drug or alcohol misuse

Depression in former fighters can be associated with self-criticism, low self-esteem, introspection and a change in social status after the conflict. Developing Ruiz's outcomes due to this type of depression, other studies (Silver 2005; Stein and Hollander 2002; Delfos 2004; Nutt, Feeney and Argyropoulos 2002; Papageorgiou and Wells 2004; Carr 2001; Sloman and Gilbert 2000) state that those who are extremely self-analytical usually display symptoms of:

Isolation

Irritation towards peers and family members

Aggression

Unfriendliness

Lack of sympathy

Lack of receptiveness

During conversations with former fighters, it was not always as easy to identify symptoms of depression as it was to identify the characteristics listed above. Many interviewees expressed their disapproval of these characteristics as manifested by fellow former fighters. These are common traits presented by those who do not feel themselves to be integrated members of the community.

Some [former fighters] survived by local work labour jobs to make a living, some have been involved in armed robbery. They are not doing anything; they are not doing anything good for people to see. That's how the community sees them, to me. I feel, isn't it strange when you hear about someone who is doing something evil himself. Those are the ex guys. They are not just polluted but they are addicted to this. Because the simple people are going to take drugs because it's a focus point. This is telling the mind to do more than what they propose. And it's just to get a living. We're just back from war so everyone has to look for security for themselves. I feel that my community ... they are all young guys. The majority of them are enjoying their lives. Community is one word secured by the youth of the area. There are some communities that these guys are going to where nobody sees them or nobody knows them. But now we are just out of the war so you have to call on security for yourself. If there is someone we know, one or two ex-generals that tried to put themselves into order after the war with some of them and

they go astray. These guys never knew or never felt that the war was going to finish. They never felt that terror was going to reign or reach here one day. For me the majority of these guys are not learned and they had nothing before the war, these guys have nothing except for the war. That's their living. If you take someone's living from them what would they do? Some of these guys don't want to do interviews, they keep the money and forget everything different. Some guys went to school because of money. At the end of the day they will always accept me while I have money. At the end of the day they do nothing, they don't go to school and they collect their money from bribing. They are earning their own money and they don't have the notion to go back to education. (Robert 2006, pers. comm., 14 July)

Robert is an "old former fighter" in his 30s. He is very critical of those he refers to as "ex guys". They are always associated with the characteristics typical of depression such as aggressive behaviour, use of drugs and disconnection from the rest of the community.

Supporting the idea of separation from the community, Kramlinger (2002) in his study claims that the phase just before depression is a decrease in social interaction. This can affect the former fighters' interaction with the normal, stable community and in turn affect the self-identification process.

Another common characteristic of former fighters, according to Stein and Hollander (2002), is low self-esteem. A recent study of female former fighters by Thase and Lang (2004) indicate that negative relationships usually affected self-esteem rather than causing depression. However, low self-esteem and depression are closely related. Nutt, Feeney and Argyropoulos (2002) show that the level of social support and self-esteem or lack of depression had a mutually dependent relationship.

Harter (1990) argues that self-esteem was based on the ability of an individual to value oneself, while Cooley (1902) claims that self-esteem is based in a social conception based in turn on acceptance by family and friends and on one's own personality. According to Bronfenbrenner (1989), the social system is based on either identity or status, and self-esteem is therefore based on personal, social and biological factors. Self-esteem is one of the determinants of how former fighters evaluate themselves and assess themselves as valued members of the community (i.e. the process of self-categorization). This definition has proved accurate in recent years and

has been linked with associated execution (Markus 1977), manner alteration (Eccles *et al.* 1984; Sullivan 1953), social participation (Rosenberg 1991), post-war academic achievements (Assor and Connell 1991; Marsh 1990a), and emotional welfare (Bandura 1978; Dweck and Elliot 1983). The growth and development of every individual is affected by the level of self-esteem. The significance for this thesis is the impact on society and on the individual's social relationships. It is also necessary to consider what motivates the actions of the individual displaying the characteristics of low self-esteem and feelings of disapproval from the community.

Some authors associate levels of self-esteem with self-assessment (Harter 1983), and self-conception (Marsh 1990a). According to Rosenberg (1991) self-esteem is not based on ideals but on other factors, such as the following (e.g. Marsh 1990a; Harter 1983; Wylie 1979):

the varying degrees and interpretation of self-evaluations

the relationships between the self-concept and self-esteem

Orr and Dinur (1995) claim that those whose development is based on the self-concept and self-esteem place high regard on the opinions and perceptions that others have of them. Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978) argue that self-concept is mainly the result of the perceptions of family and peers as well as self-perception, and that it has a pivotal effect on their social relationships.

The sociological impact of depression and low self-esteem is a sense of isolation and separation from the wider community. Stephen, a young former fighter who runs a small business in the Duala market, said:

Most of the time when there is a meeting in our town and me or some of my friends who fight the war get up to talk our own ideas, the big community people and some others will not even give me the chance to talk; sometimes they will say that this is no war business. When I get vexed and say something bad, they will say, ah! That's the same thing we were saying, this man still get war business inside him. I am not participating to that anymore.
(Stephen 2009, pers. comm., 19 May)

Feeling discriminated against adds to the feeling of separation from the community. Mammade is another former fighter who, in conversation with Stephen, remarked:

I think I told you that people always take us to be former fighters and we do not have good record in our communities; most of the time my own people can treat me bad. Sometimes when my own wife does something wrong and when I want talk, the people will say, ah, he is ready again. To tell you the truth, I actually can feel bad why I had to fight war; some of the same big commanders and politicians who fooled us are now in position, but they can behave as if they don't know us from anywhere before, they do not care for us. For me, I feel that I need not to live again. I am not part of this community anymore. (Mammade 2009, pers. comm., 19 May)

A social reaction such as a sense of isolation sometimes comes from sensations of loneliness. The loneliness referred to in this thesis is what Weiss (1973) defines as social isolation. This is a kind of social deficit that occurs when an individual lacks a social network. This lack of sense of connectivity mostly represents not feeling part of the community, especially after losing a sense of belonging in one of the factions.

... some people always point the finger to me and say, you see that one there, she was fighting for Charles Taylor and so I can be ashamed, for that, I like to keep to myself [be on my own]. Even the school that I am going to I can feel bad and just go and sit in the class until after school then I can just go straight to my house. I am not feeling good because everywhere you go, people will just have to point on you that you was one time fighter for NPFL. I don't associate myself to that people anymore. It can make me feel bad so I like to keep to myself. (Mammade 2009, pers. comm., 19 May)

Elisabeth Schauer, director of Vivo, an organisation that works to overcome and prevent traumatic stress and its consequences, in an interview for the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Programme (MDRP), spoke about “Psycho-Social Support for Ex-Combatants”. She emphasised:

One of the key psycho-social issues for ex-combatants is that they frequently perceive themselves as somehow “different” – they feel that they belong more to their peer community rather than their home community. In turn, the wider community views them with a judgmental, often stigmatizing, eye ... Recent reintegration studies in Rwanda show that some ex-combatants feel lonely

and isolated, and suffer from PTSD and depression. (MDRP, 2007: no page)

Isolation and separation from society are both cause and effect of the feelings of low approval among former fighters. Delfos (2004) claims that strong, healthy relationships with family and peers have a positive impact on the psyche, outlook and physical performance of former fighters. Stein and Hollander (2002) also affirm in their study that former fighters who had a strong supportive environment showed a more accelerated recovery from traumatic war experiences and depression than those who did not. Stigmatisation plays a major role in the self-identification process. The sense of being alienated by the community affects former fighters' self-esteem and self-image and therefore their new self-identification.

Given a constructive, stable environment, with healthy relationships, the identity of the individual can develop as former fighters are more easily able to deal with their trauma. When former fighters are not forced to suppress their trauma they can begin a healthy reconstruction of identity. Suppression of the trauma generally arises because of external factors, such as reactions from the community.

Their experiences during the war transformed the identity of the fighters. When they returned from the conflict they therefore had to reconstruct their former, pre-war civilian identity. However, the former fighters do not always feel accepted by the community and this further hampers their identity reconstruction.

... I want to be a civilian. I am trying to move away from life of being a soldier. However the civilians don't want us. They do not want us to be part of them. We are seen as criminals, people are scared of us. The police hate us and always blame us for anything that goes wrong. (as quoted in Mogapi 2004: 223)

The reason for this is the lack of understanding by the community and the families. "... Our families ask us: what has being a soldier done for you? You went away all these years and what do you have to prove for it" (as quoted in Mogapi 2004: 223). This adds to their feelings of frustration and sense of betrayal by the community. They feel that the community does not recognise their sacrifices.

4.2.4 The dynamics of post-war networks

A large number of former fighters did not go back to their own communities after the end of the conflict and in cases where they entered a new community they did not feel part of it. The failure of community-driven reconstruction in Liberia is confirmed by the modest number of programmes designed for the communities. Most of the resources for the reconstruction process were directed to addressing the problems of former fighters. The inability of the international community to tackle the problems of both non-combatants and combatants together created a gap between the former fighters and the communities. The natural reaction of the ex-soldiers was to congregate with people sharing the same problems into a new “society”.

Conversely, some other former fighters are welcomed back by family and neighbours and find a place in society, yet many feel that their community still views them as fighters even if their overall attitude is positive and friendly. The fact that they are perceived by the community as former fighters, which is mostly perceived as a negative factor, makes them feel excluded.

The overall approach of the community and the DDR policies plays an important role in the former fighters’ sense of inclusion because, when they return home, they believe they are coming back to the same situations and people that they left; hence they expect things to pick up where they left off. However, as the interviews showed, this is not the case.

The community was eager to receive me and still see me as someone who is part and parcel the day to day improvement in the community. The community had no other option but to warmly welcome me in their midst. Because pushing us away couldn’t solve the problem, but rather make it worst. (Roosevelt 2006, pers. comm., 24 September)

Subsequent to joining the forces the fighters, especially the younger ones, lived in a completely new environment different from the one they had been living in, and this eventually led to alienation from their families (Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot 2003: 35). Communities and even families perceived the new arrivals negatively as former fighters, even though on the surface they seemed to be relieved and happy to have them back as part of the community:

When combatants enter the DDR process, they lose this support network.

During demobilisation, some combatants will try to return to whatever is left of this support network by reconnecting with other ex-combatants, living together in the areas where they were demilitarised, and refusing to return to their home communities. While the return of ex-combatants to their home communities may appear to outsiders to be a great relief and reward, for ex-combatants it can be a traumatic experience because it requires giving up the support network of the war family and returning, often alone, to their home community where they may not be accepted, are not immediately integrated into a support network, and therefore are left to fend for themselves. (Hazen 2007: 5–6)

However, the relationships and networks that had previously existed were permanently damaged, as was felt by the former fighters:

You can say some have changed when you observe their way of living. They have a normal way of living in the community or on their real lives. Some other of these guys just act like this, then when they are rejected from the community they fall into the ways they used to behave before and they act very angry. I can't really say something good or bad about them. Everyone has a different system, a different notion. Some of the guys were educated before the war and this have made an impact. In one way or another after their life during the war, the mind is different. Some of them have a similar lives, some want a better than before and some want to live upon what they have done before. (Bob 2006, pers. comm., 26 September)

This dynamic of exclusion made them change their attitudes towards the community and to choose a different path than that of reintegration. Hence it is important for the reintegration process, especially in areas like Liberia, to be “foolproof” in order to provide some stability and confidence for the former fighters, so that they are reassured that effective social and psychological reintegration can help them overcome the perception of former fighters in the eyes of the communities they live in. Separation from the community of former fighters accentuates the group stigma:

This group stigma was actually reinforced by DDR, which segregated and privileged self-described “ex-combatants”, feeding into a “no satisfaction, no peace” dynamic. It may also be that stigmatization is invoked by observers to describe what are actually considered to be extremely complicated processes of urbanization, migration, and social change. Using reintegration as a tool to

combat or compensate for stigma may therefore be misguided (Jennings 2008b: 336).

The community at the end of the war was not ready to receive the new guests because of their negative associations and the way they were perceived:

Sometimes when we go to smoke our cigarettes to forget the hard time on us, we can sit and be talking about the war time and the problems we are going through now. By the time people see us in big group talking about our frustrations when the people passing some of them say: look at the ex-comb. There, they are smoking grass so they can go steal tonight. (Saylee 2006, pers. comm., 7 July)

The failure to minimise such differentiation within society caused the soldiers to create their own links and networks, which further accentuated the gap between them and the community. That was also the case in Namibia where

...[a]lthough a formal mechanism for exchanging or coordinating views among ex-combatants does not exist, they have evidently created their own informal networks. At the local level interaction with former comrades in arms seems to flourish. Any work together, for example, on resettlement projects, in the same business or in agricultural activities (Colletta, Kostner and Wiederhofer 1996: 12).

After the end of a conflict and also after demobilisation programmes, the command structures often survive as networks (Knight 2008: 11). “Experience suggests that the command structures will continue to exist as social networks and bonds created through shared experiences, and that such structures retain the capacity to remobilise combatants or disturb the progression of the peace process” (Knight 2008: 12). In many cases they disappear for a period but reappear stronger and more durable after exclusion from the communities. After demobilisation, in fact, the positive reaction to the end of the conflict made the former fighters believe that they would return completely to their previous life, and they kept their contacts within the war networks only in case of a new outbreak of hostilities (Utas 2003: 226). However, those former fighters who experienced problems in returning to their communities, or who preferred to retain their previous links, decided to create new, voluntary networks based on the previous ones – for example, the young fighters in “The Palace” described by Utas (2003: 235–6), where “those who had parents or other relatives in

Monrovia tended to avoid them. Family networks were instead replaced with informal structures of wartime friends and commanders”. The social networks born after the end of the conflict were a natural evolution of those that existed during the war, with changed contexts. In certain cases these social networks were recreated at a later stage when the fighters were brought together again by their exclusion by civil society. Even if these networks are a development of those of the past, they are not the same. According to my experience, most of them lack the boundaries of faction or ethnic affiliation:

Interviewer: how do you survive?

Kamara: There’s nothing much to do to survive. I just go around with my friends from war to help out for food because there’s nothing else to do.

Interviewer: Are your friends from back in the time of the war?

Kamara: No, we are all ex-comb. There is no differentiation with us, we are all black old fighters from everywhere, rebels, GOL, ULIMO, Mandingo, Krahn. (Kamara 2006, pers. comm., 23 June)

A survey conducted in Sierra Leone by Humphreys and Weinstein (2004) shows how relationships between the networks originated after the conflict and the participation of former fighters in particular factions. They gathered together after the war, building networks with people met during and after the conflict. On the other hand, in the case of a faction composed of combatants with firm networks of families, friends and communities, the majority of its members spent time with the same networks after the war. This is not the case in Liberia because there was no clear demarcation of factions that were closer to their communities than others. In most cases these networks are the expressions of the malfunction of the reintegration process and therefore an expression of the failure of the process of inclusion:

I tried to not go around with fighters ‘cause those who are not fighters will think I smoke opium marijuana, because they’re the only people who doesn’t mind associating with them, because they say they’ve smoke drug marijuana they don’t want to see me so I tried to associate with other groups but to associate with them is difficult. I went back to my old school and I went back to my old friends. All my friends have been telling me you better go. (Andy 2006, pers. comm., 3 August)

Experiencing exclusion, most of the former combatants tried to find comfort by gathering with individuals in the same situation. At this stage the former fighters decided unconsciously to shift their sphere of interest from the community to their new social networks that made them feel part of their “society”.

There is no evidence that these networks could be considered for a threat to the stability of the country. According to Hill *et al.* (2008) only a small percentage of former soldiers would be willing to go back to fighting or think that it could be an option for their future. Only 6% of the respondents said their life conditions had been better before the war; among the remainder, 36% gave as the first reason for thinking that “life is better now” the fact that they were no longer in danger. However, they can be considered as tools for political or economic organisations to use as pressure groups. In some cases former fighters organised themselves in order to claim certain rights. This is the case of the protest in Monrovia in early February 2007 when around 1,000 former members of Liberia’s former factions sought explanations about their allowances and demobilisation packages:

The president did not want to speak with us so for the first time we have been organising ourselves. For the first time a group of nationals have come to listen to this country and ask the ex-combs how we feel about they pay the \$75. We were fighting for our countries and between 2000 and 2001 the national army of the country were in charge of the government now we received no benefit. They move away the army and take our benefits. (Ben 2006, pers. comm., 3 August)

In conclusion, many factors lead to the maintenance of the war networks after the conflict. Lack of familiarity with community and family, feelings of discrimination and low sense of approval from the community are all essential elements for the general dynamic of exclusion from social life.

4.2.5 The informal economy’s contribution to the sense of exclusion

According to research conducted by Jennings (2008: 337):

A second layer relates less to targeting and more to the overall suitability of the project. Here one must consider the incentives being created or perpetuated on individual- and macro- levels through reintegration programs: are they distortive to the extent that they facilitate separation, not

reintegration, of former fighters from society, as in Liberia?

The fact is that former fighters' overall attitude to work and willingness to undertake it plays a critical part in the general implementation of a successful and sustainable post-conflict security structure. If the overall attitude is one of laziness, the prospects would not be good. However, most individuals who joined the conflict as combatants did so not because they were idle or lazy but because they felt they needed to join in order to deal with an imminent threat. The presumption of laziness or idleness on the part of former fighters is a misconception relating to pre-war circumstances (for more details see Bøas and Hatløy 2008). In relation to the post-conflict setting, the perception of former fighters of how they are seen by society is the focal point for exploring the concepts of laziness and idleness.

To understand how economic reintegration was designed from the beginning by the international community, we may note a passage from the Strategy Framework:

Given the fact that many former fighters have neither finished formal education nor acquired marketable skills, the economic outlook for many former fighters is bleak. Absorption in the formal sector, including the civil service, is beyond the reach of unskilled or functionally illiterate former fighters. Hence the need to offer options for economic reintegration, in particular in agriculture, the informal sector enterprise and opportunity for skills acquisition, to avoid former fighters from reverting to rent seeking at the barrel of a gun. (NCDRR 2003: 32)

This assumes that former fighters are excluded from the formal sector, with the informal sector as the only solution. In terms of a pragmatic approach to the problem of the ex-soldiers, the above analysis is faulty. Firstly, the soldiers were not just unemployed and uprooted, but a heterogeneous part of the population with different backgrounds, education and skills. Secondly, the rest of the population shared some characteristics with the former fighters because 14 years of civil war had interrupted education or work. Hence, the fact that the reintegration programmes were designed on the assumption that the informal market was the only way to ensure economic self-sufficiency for the former fighters laid the foundation for a general exclusion from any other sectors of the labour market.

The informal sector is so strong in Liberia that there is an objective difficulty in defining employment. Some authors, for example, describe economic reintegration

as “achieving relatively sustained employment and regular income” (Hill *et al.* 2008: 13). The expectations created by the DDR programmes around these two concepts also motivated most former fighters to consider themselves as unemployed after their courses, highlighting their sense of exclusion. The entire rehabilitation programme of the DDR in Liberia was centred on vocational training and schooling. A large number of former fighters went through vocational training in areas of work such as carpentry, mechanics and masonry. These courses were not chosen systematically to satisfy the needs of the economic market, and they created a huge skilled but unemployed workforce of former fighters who ended up instead buying and selling goods on the roadside.

The informal economy in developing countries represents the only way for a large part of the population to subsist – especially in failed states. In some cases this “shadow economy” takes on the features of a parallel economy and casual employment becomes the norm. In Africa the informal economy was estimated to be 42% of GDP in 1999/2000 and reached 78% of non-agricultural employment and over 61% of urban employment (ILO 2002). Liberia is actually a borderline case, with an estimated 80 to 85% of the population aged 15 years and over unemployed. Unlike the hidden economies of most African countries, with the characteristics of a structured financial system, in Liberia the increase in this phenomenon is due to the spontaneous efforts to survive of the local population, including former fighters, who have no other means of survival.

In 2004 the ILO and UNICEF, in collaboration with the Liberia Institute of Public Administration (LIPA), surveyed entrepreneurs in the informal sector who could contribute to a future strategy for a “regularisation” of the market. If we endorse the idea that Liberia is a “failed state” (Pham 2004), we have to analyse the institutional presence of the state and the control of the central government over its people and its territory. It is clear that in Liberia there was never a proper exercise of authority (Sawyer 2005) as in most of the Third World, where the sovereignty of post-colonial states was more a formal situation than an effective exercise of power (Jackson 1990). This lack of control brought about, as in most of the weak states, the birth of a parallel, illegal system of rule, with the beginning of the phenomenon of “warlordism” (Ellis 1998), which provided the combatants with their basic needs during recent decades. After the end of the war and the change of economic control in

most of the 15 counties of Liberia, there was a collapse of the previous social structure, and an influx of 100,000 ex-combatants to the market added to the already desperate circumstances of the population with no income.

The new order led to a substantial change in the Liberian micro- and macroeconomic system, which the reborn state, with a transitional government and no public revenue, could not control. At this point there was an increase in “shadow” economic networks (Jung 2003) and a proliferation of small formal or informal businesses due to the lack of regulation.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Overview

In conclusion, this work has analysed the evolution of marginalisation in Liberia considering individual cases from Liberian youth to them feeling like neglected veterans. The study has concentrated on establishing a debate on the concept of marginalisation of former fighters in the Liberian civil conflict and has attempted to underline the connections that exist between status, identity and networks within this debate. The study focused mainly on the status of the identity of the former fighters in Liberia, particularly after the end of the conflict as this was the significant turning point for their aforementioned identity, as Liberian society began to evolve in a post-conflict era. The work gave a voice to the ex-soldiers and how they perceived themselves during the evolution. The study found that a variety of psycho-social factors were important in the perceived feeling of marginalisation felt by former soldiers, even if specific individuals did not always highlight the same factors as responsible for this marginalisation.

In presenting this conclusion, it is pertinent to point out that the thesis offers five central conclusions to the study within the nature of the overall aim of assessing the impact on youth through to neglected veterans through the transformation of the web of connections that exist. This conclusion presents an overview of the main conclusions made and is divided into six main sections. The conclusions of this study focus on the belief that the neglected veterans group is viewed as different to that of former fighters, that the identity of former fighters is central to the understanding of the reintegration process, that the DDR triggered the transformation of former fighters' web of connections, acceptance does not necessarily mean reintegration and can often include exclusion and that the economic approach to the reintegration process failed to distinguish civilians from former fighters.

Finally, the main conclusion of this study is presented. The work found that individuals marginalised by society as youths (for a range of reasons) turned to violence to solve the problem. This led to the marginalised becoming a collective group during the conflict and gave their lives meaning. The study concludes that the group identity of the neglected veteran as an excluded category is frequently the result

of many psycho-social dynamics. A resilient sense of belonging, detachment from family and community, marginalised primary identities, and war-connected networks are all factors influencing this exclusion. Through these factors, former soldiers may be accepted or rejected by their communities; they may be economically inserted in or excluded from the market, but they feel like neglected veterans and they all share this new identity. The creation of this new virtual group and its identity is the key to understanding the success or failure of the reintegration process in Liberia, and possibly also in other countries and therefore it was vital to consider the factors that impacted upon this feeling of marginalisation, as this study has done.

First though, it was necessary to provide a theoretical conceptualization of the observed phenomena in the study.

5.2 Theoretical conceptualisation of the observed phenomena

The study has assessed that it is apparent that marginality for some Liberians is far from over. The integration of the former fighters in Liberia is a difficult process and the youth in particular need to be given a clear indication that they have a future in the post-conflict state. The armed mobilized youth who decided to join the conflict have been experiencing transformation in terms of status, networks and identity but in some cases they did not see the end of their marginalisation.

United Nations departments, programmes, funds and agencies, together with non-governmental agencies, were involved in the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of former combatants in post-conflict Liberian situations for approximately six years. Their activities were crucial parts of both the initial stabilisation of a war-torn society and the former fighters' long-term development. The UN was instrumental in the re-establishment of a country left with poor governance and lacking basic political, social and economic structures. It also supported the new Government of Liberia (GOL) in its quest to restore civil authority.

It has been evaluated that it is particularly difficult to achieve stability and reconciliation in post-conflict countries caught in internal civil conflicts. Many factors affecting their achievement must be taken into account. Leaving aside the historical background of each country, the main differentiation that must be taken into consideration is the process of reintegration of former fighters, which varies from one country to another. This thesis is able to contribute to the literature on the

reintegration of former fighters in Liberia, approaching the topic from a perspective of identity. It covered the full spectrum of the status and networks of former fighters after the end of the conflict, describing the psychological and societal changes.

With the formal closure of the DDRR programme, announced by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2009, the reintegration process was declared concluded. She praised the programme for bringing peace and security to Liberia. The deputy UN envoy, Deputy Special Representative for Rule of Law Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, reiterated that all further efforts would be community-based rather than focusing on a particular group in the community (UNMIL Today 2009). This declaration signalled the end of the international community's efforts on the reintegration of former fighters. Was this the real end of the reintegration process? The analysis conducted up to this point about the reintegration process in Liberia has been an accurate investigation of the changing behaviour of former fighters and how this affected communities and the whole of Liberian society. In most of the literature available, the character of "former fighter" has been considered without any questioning of its nature and position in society. This thesis proposes a critical analysis of this new category of people that arose from the end of the war.

The literature and the primary research conducted underline that the former fighters can have an important and central role in the community, during the war as well as after it. The end of the war gave them a more passive role in the community and they felt disorientated. Their perplexity was increased by their perception of the community's reaction to its new members, which could be acceptance or rejection following the in-group/out-group mechanism.

Bearing this in mind helps us to analyse the evolution of the marginalisation process. It is important to note that the confused idea of the former fighters about their position in the community did not help to maintain a solid structure of status and identity. Usually during the war, the status and identity of the combatants remained within the controlled environment of active decision-making. After the war however, this drastically changed as defining status and identity lay with the community. The status of former fighter prejudiced this uncertain mood and the former fighters were not really sure any more of their position in the community. During this period, giving voice to the former fighters to describe their sensitivities and observations of their position in society enabled this work to understand the way they perceive themselves and the way they are perceived by others. Starting from this point, the development of

the web of connections of the former fighters is delineated, with an analysis of their feelings and reactions to the current situation.

The approach to the transformation of the former fighters' web of connections is to focus on them not as individuals but as a group. The common characteristics, feelings and behaviours of the group of former fighters are presented here in depth. Discrimination, loneliness, marginalisation, non-acceptance and disapproval by the community are just some of the characteristics outlined. This thesis is a journey into the transformation of former fighters' web of connections, starting from the dissolution of the status of "fighter", passing through the disintegration of the war networks and continuing with the formation of the category of former fighters, who have a distinctive identity.

After this trip inside the life of the former fighters through their own words, this chapter draws the conclusions of my research. The first sub-section highlights these conclusions. The following sub-section is an explanation of why the identities approach was relevant to understanding the reintegration process, and discusses whether a different approach to the topic, leading to different conclusions, would have been more appropriate. A justification is needed of how this thesis is relevant for academic and general purposes, explaining why, when dealing with reintegration, it is more appropriate to consider factors such as identity, status and individuality collectively and in terms of networks, rather than focusing only on the economic mechanism of the DDR programmes.

5.3 Drawn Conclusions

5.3.1 Conclusion 1: The "neglected veterans" group as distinct from "former fighters"

This thesis has defined a difference between the "former fighters" and the category of "neglected veterans". Chapter 3 explained that the term "ex-combatants" has sometimes been used for the group of former fighters with a tag carrying negative connotations and who do not feel reintegrated, but also for those who do feel reintegrated. To avoid confusion the term "neglected veteran" was coined to identify this category composed of those experiencing the feeling of discrimination and exclusion from the community in more permanent ways. However, further evidence is needed to sustain these assertions. Now, after hearing the voices of the former

fighters, it is time to put the pieces of the puzzle together.

The first point to be addressed is the actual distinctive element of characterisation that this thesis uses to identify “former fighters” and “neglected veterans”. The main point of differentiation between former fighters and neglected veterans is whether or not they experience sensations of exclusion from the community, generated by the end of the war. This sensation may be permanent or temporary. Chapters 2 and 3 described the internal and external factors that led to the general sensation of exclusion, reconstructing a series of recurrent events and feelings heard through the voices of all the informants met during the research. Even if these common experiences were shared by most of the informants, there is no evidence that all the former fighters in Liberia shared the same experience. A pragmatic analysis of this research makes us understand that the lack of statistical surveys makes it difficult to prove the universality of these experiences. However, it has never been the intention of this thesis to produce definite empirical results deriving from quantitative data. Nevertheless, even if there is no rigorous data, we can assert that there are only three situations that any former fighter could have found himself in after the end of the conflict: (1) not experiencing any sensation of exclusion, (2) experiencing the sensation for a temporary period or (3) experiencing the sensation for a more permanent period.

Concerning (1), former fighters who have not experienced any sensation of exclusion are those who perceived the reintegration as a success. They are the ones who were fully reintegrated. They are “invisible in the crowd”. They do not face any of the problematic emotions, states, feelings and experiences presented in this thesis. Their social adaptation has been swift and the majority have experienced a smooth transition into society. The actual passage from “fighter” to active member of society took place over a short period. Some of them did not even go through the DDR programmes but went directly back to their communities. Conversations showed that the characteristics of these fighters were different from those of other soldiers investigated. The main characteristics of this group are that they have ties with the community or family and/or had a short period of service in the factions. The attachment to community or families prevented them from relying on the war networks as their only support system. These factors delayed or prevented them from acquiring the status of fighter, facilitating their reintegration into the community after the war. It is unlikely that these individuals experienced a state of confusion after the

conflict.

The second group is composed of those who experienced sensations of exclusion for a temporary period. During my visits to Liberia I met numerous informants on different occasions and several of them said that their feelings regarding their status had changed. Others whom I met only once also described this change. All these informants shared common feelings of exclusion from the community in an initial period after the end of the conflict but not thereafter:

The comments of the former fighters who followed this path have been used in the thesis to validate the theories expressed. These individuals experienced problems with the new social order after the war. In many cases they went through a period of confusion and struggled to find the right reintegration path. They shared common feelings of exclusion only for a temporary period. There is no evidence (nor is it essential for the outcome of this work) to explain why at a certain stage of their lives the process of reintegration worked for them and not for others. What is essential for this thesis is to highlight that they felt like ex-combatants, even if only for a temporary period.

The third and last group are those who experienced a more permanent feeling of exclusion. The interviews highlighted that former soldiers often felt excluded from the beginning. These are the “neglected veterans”, the central focus of this thesis. These individuals have experienced feelings of betrayal, discrimination and marginalisation that lead to a state of confusion. Defining the feelings of this group is essential to understanding all the components of their social exclusion from society.

A second point to address is the definition of the neglected veterans as a group or category. As stated several times, the former fighters in general have been considered as a group or category by many authors without analysing in depth the implications of this statement. While a *group* is just a collection of individuals interacting and sharing common characteristics, a social *category* consists of individuals sharing common characteristics without social interaction. The essential characteristic of the group is in fact social interaction (Hare 1962). Both former fighters and neglected veterans share similar characteristics, but what about social relations? Chapter 2 explained that former fighters in general can be considered as a category because they are recognised by the reintegration programmes. In addition it can be said that former fighters in general cannot be considered as a group because, when homogenised with the community, they do not interact with each other. They

still share similar characteristics that, if linked with the past, make them recognisable as a category (military skills, former affiliation to factions, etc).

The neglected veterans, on the other hand, can be considered a group because of their interaction through their networks. However, social relationships do not occur between all the members of the group but between networks. This level of social relationship varies depending on ties and links with the community. Any neglected veteran could feel excluded but at the same time have some sort of interaction with the community. This usually occurs in a more extended way in rural and semi-rural areas rather than in urban areas. According to the comments from informants, those from Margibi County had a better interaction with the local community and felt less isolated. This was also the case of “The Palace” (Utas 2003) where young former fighters were living “footloose” among their peers and out of range of society. A different situation was experienced by Utas’ informants in Ganta, who had more interaction with neighbours, working places, churches, and so on.

In summary, this thesis defines the group “neglected veterans” as the collection of individuals who temporarily or permanently experienced feelings of exclusion. They are a smaller group within the wider category of former fighters. The remainder of those people involved in the war who are not recognised as “neglected veterans” are the “former fighters”. They have mostly disappeared into the communities. While neglected veterans chose to interact with peers from neglected veterans support networks, the former fighters returned to their families, the community and their networks.

5.3.2 Conclusion 2: The identity of “former fighter” is central for understanding the reintegration process

As stated above, the distinctive characteristic that divides the *category* of former fighters from the *group* of neglected veterans is the feeling of exclusion from society. Furthermore, it is no coincidence that the concepts of inclusion and exclusion are central to the notion of reintegration. As shown in Chapter 4, concepts of inclusion and exclusion are linked to the notion of identity. Identity was approached in Chapter 4 as a collective phenomenon that “denotes a fundamental and consequential *sameness* among members of a group or a category. This may be understood objectively (as a sameness in ‘itself’) or subjectively (as an experienced, felt, or perceived sameness)” (Brubaker and Cooper 2004: 65). From this point of view it is

easier to analyse the former fighters in general as a group or category instead of as individuals. Starting from the point that “identity is something all groups have, or ought to have” (Brubaker and Cooper 2004: 67), the identity affiliation with a group triggers the in-group/out-group mechanism of discrimination. The boundaries created by the group affiliation generate the sensation of exclusion of the neglected veterans group from the civilians. According to the transitive law, if exclusion is related to reintegration and identity, then reintegration can also be explained in terms of identity.

From this point of view an effective reintegration process must pay more attention to the identity transformation process of former fighters after the war. Before and during the conflict the fighters had multiple identities, depending on their interaction with different groups. Identification with a particular ethnicity, religion, warring faction, political party and so on provided the fighters with a world of different options that could be chosen after the end of the war. The critical variable for this choice is the strength of the primary identity. When the primary identity is completely dominant over the others, it is likely that the choices after the war will correspond with it. If we take for example the three possible situations in which the former fighters may find themselves after the war, it can be asserted that:

(1) Those not experiencing exclusion might have had a strong primary identity other than the factional. Their process of identity evolution is gradual and not unexpected because they did not go through the phase of being identified as ex-combatant. This possibly occurred because they did not break the links with their identity before the war. Consequently, their primary identity was not “fighter” and they could easily detach themselves from being soldiers. After the conflict these individuals homogenised their identities with the rest of society.

(2) Those experiencing exclusion for a short period might have had different identities at the same level and after a period of confusion they might have chosen to abandon the identity of former fighter for their previous identities. These cases are more frequent in the rural and semi-rural areas where interaction with the community is more common. There is insufficient data available to fully explain this group, however, as other variables may be involved such as strong personality, coincidence, personal relationships, and so on.

(3) Those recognised as “neglected veterans” and who experienced exclusion all along had a strong primary identity as fighters. They experienced difficulties in the reinsertion process because of involvement with the factions. This is the case of most

of the informants in this thesis, who believed “my commanders, my comrades and the faction were everything for me. They were my home, my family, my food ...” (Saye 2009, pers. comm., 17 June). In many cases they are still relying on the support of war-related networks, shared with those who had similar experiences. Their primary identity during the conflict was of “fighters” and this overrode other identities. The ethnic part of their identity was largely dominated by the factional. The informants never identified themselves with a particular ethnic group, as Utas also mentions (2003: 17).

In my research, I did not find meaningful separate ethnic entities or “cultures”, even though the Liberian civil war to some extent became ethnicised on the level of national politics. It would be more accurate to say that many neglected veterans experienced the contrary, i.e. ethnic separation. As it was, warring factions recruited youth from various ethnic backgrounds and it was common to see movement between the competing factions (Utas 2003: 16).

Having a strong primary identity of “fighters” during the conflict made it more likely that they would retain this identity after the war, keeping the network alive and highlighting the division with civilians. This differentiation is the result of a strong primary identity as an expression of the collective group of former fighters. Strong collective identity implies strong group bonding and homogeneity, a high degree of group dynamics, an identity or sameness between group members, a sharp distinctiveness from non-members, and a clear boundary between inside and outside.

To define the identity of neglected veteran, this thesis took into consideration the identity of youth in Liberia after the conflict. Without disagreeing with other scholars on this topic (Richards 2005; Utas 2003; Munive 2010; Peters 2007), this thesis adds another level to the understanding of youth, agreeing with Munive (2010b: 36) that even if there is extensive literature available on youth and conflict, not many studies have been conducted on the young population in the aftermath of the war. For the category of former fighters, the identity “neglected veteran” is in many cases a natural evolution of the “youth” identity during the war. The relationship between the two identities is evident. Both identities are a crossover, which is an expression of exclusion/marginalisation independent of the presence of other identities such as ethnicity, religion, political, and so on. The marginalisation of youth, which was one of the causes of the war, was in some cases exacerbated by the exclusion of the neglected veterans after the war. The recognition of the “former fighter” accentuated

the previous marginalisation, since being a youth was in many cases the primary motivation for discrimination. According to Vigh (2006) the definition of “youth” involves a social “becoming” because it is a category of people in movement. In some cases members of this category evolved into “neglected veterans”. The social and economic marginalisation of youth before the war thus developed into a social and economic exclusion of the neglected veteran.

In summary, this thesis outlines how identity and exclusion are essential elements of the reintegration process. While those who do not experience exclusion homogenise their identity with the rest of the population, the neglected veterans isolate themselves from society. This sense of exclusion has similarities with the marginalisation of many of them as youths before the war. To a certain extent, the identity of “neglected veteran” can be considered as one possible evolution of the pre-war youth identity. Developing Utas’ (2008) idea of youth as an “alternative moral community”, neglected veterans can be considered as one of the “primary identities – such as forming part of a marginalised population, or participating in a fighting faction – [which] might in some cases be of more importance than apparently ‘primordial’ attachments such as ethnic identity” (Utas 2008: 114). Fanthorpe (2001) defines the moral community as a refuge where disorientated individuals can share the burden of alienation and can struggle for cultural rights. This is the case of the neglected veteran who, after a period of confusion, gathers together a new set of post-war networks. These networks are the expression of the identity isolation of the group.

5.3.3 Conclusion 3: DDR triggered the transformation of former fighters’ web of connections

As stated in Chapter 2, the post-conflict order in Liberian society was directly affected by the peacekeeping operation. Liberia is in a state of post-conflict recovery. In a post-conflict situation all efforts are directly influenced by the peacekeeping measures and strategies of government and communities. One of the most important peacekeeping strategies investigated in empirical studies is the DDR. Kieh (2009) explains that after the first DDR in 1996 there was an attempt to establish quickly procedures for disarmament and demobilisation, and that these were ultimately inefficient and inappropriate. This is why, he argues, more conflict was expected in Liberia after the failure of the first DDR in 1996; he felt that, in order to avoid further

difficulties, it was necessary for the government and national parties to learn from their mistakes and be better prepared in the future.

DDR plans are usually essential to ensure successful intervention in post-conflict areas. The main aim of the DDR process in Liberia was to take guns from fighters and to reintegrate them into the communities, but to achieve these targets the fighters had to pass through the whole process of dissolution of the status of “fighter” and the disintegration of the “war family”. These actions triggered a series of reactions at both a psychological and a social level in the former fighters’ lives. The social and economic status of the fighters during the war, recognised even if not accepted by the majority of the population, was the result of multiple factors, including the exercise of power over civilians, access to basic goods, a sense of belonging and the support of a permanent and structured network. These elements, in contrast to the complete insecurity of civilians, set the fighters on a privileged level and in general gave them high status. With the end of the war and the change in the social and economic order in Liberia, all the privileges due to the status of soldier vanished, making adaptation to their new position more difficult for them than for others. While others, in theory, could “climb the ladder” of Liberian society, most former fighters slipped down it. The disintegration of all their certainties resulted in a state of confusion that put their identities in serious question.

Some former fighters went back to their previous lives and reacquired their previous status or identity; others were able to create new ones after the war, unrelated to their lives during the conflict; but there is a group of former soldiers who could do neither. This has given birth to a new group, which is linked to the wartime past because the surrounding community cannot ignore that link. These individuals gather together and form the group of neglected veterans. Though many other factors were involved, this group is in part a consequence of the DDR. The recognition of neglected veterans as a vulnerable group, addressed by specific policies, accentuated their differences from civilians. These differences are not just social or economic but also at the level of identity. The inability of the DDR process, by following policies of equality, to reduce the gap between combatants and non-combatants accentuated the identity differentiation between the two groups. The DDR triggered the web of connections transformation process, removing the certainties that were the basis of the fighters’ identity. While the CPA ended the war that was the *raison d’être* for their position, the DDR eradicated the status and networks that gave meaning to their lives.

These aspects represent the essential characteristics of the web of connections of “fighter”. Eliminating these elements meant forcing the fighters to seek other purposes in life and consequently to abandon their previous identity for a new one. The series of emotions generated by this social transformation, such as the sense of betrayal, abandonment, discrimination and loneliness, contributed to the creation of a state of confusion among former fighters.

The swiftness and the all-encompassing range of the passage from a warlike society to one marked by reconciliation did not give the Liberian population enough time to acclimatise. While for many non-combatants the situation represented an improvement, for many ex-combatants there was no progress. The sense of confusion generated by this situation symbolises the starting point of the identity transformation. The DDR forced the soldiers to abandon the previous identity of fighter and did not provide them with viable alternatives. The reintegration programmes in fact focused on passing on pragmatic economic and educational skills instead of a more comprehensive psycho-social “package”. Many of those who joined the fighting for reasons of marginalisation and discrimination did not see any improvement in their situation.

In summary, the DDR process started a process of identity transformation among the former fighters without offering a path for effective reintegration. Those former fighters who became fully reinserted in the community found the right path due to their personal qualities or external coincidences. In many cases the DDR, instead of generating reintegration, accentuated the divisions with the community and labelled the former fighter with the discriminatory epithet of “ex-combatant” – the neglected veteran.

5.3.4 Conclusion 4: Acceptance does not mean reintegration and sometimes involves exclusion

Most of the literature dealing with reintegration includes a final statement on the success or failure of the process. Authors discussing this problem have offered different ways to analyse the results of reintegration. Chapter 3 discussed works focusing on the success of reintegration according to the perception of acceptance felt by the former fighters themselves. Analysing the responses offered in some surveys conducted in Liberia as well as the responses of many of my informants, this thesis considers that a sense of acceptance alone is not enough to indicate effective

reintegration. In many cases the informants responded positively when asked about acceptance by family and community but also expressed confusion about their “real” inclusion. To account for this, the concept of approval by society was included. Being “accepted” but not approved by family and/or community is a common issue for neglected veterans. Being present in the community but with no social participation is considered a failure of the reintegration process. The same traits that were characteristic of the marginalisation of certain groups in society before the war are reproduced after the end of the conflict. It is not a coincidence that most of the informants expressed feelings of discrimination or marginalisation in their comments.

5.3.5 Conclusion 5: An economic approach to the reintegration process failed to distinguish civilians from former fighters

A number of approaches can be taken in analysing the reintegration of former fighters on a larger, national scale. Chapter 3 introduced Kingma’s (2000) three dimensions for considering reintegration: social, psychological and economic. This work addressed the issue of reintegration from a psycho-social perspective without taking into consideration the economic element. However, why did this thesis tackle the DDR from a perspective that is counter to actual reintegration policies? In other words, since the only programmes established by the DDR were economic-orientated, why did this thesis not seek to investigate reintegration from the economic perspective? The literature highlighted that the attempts made to reintegrate former soldiers economically failed due to the lack of education and skills held by the former soldiers.

In addition, while the major part of the reintegration process in Liberia is focused on economic aspects, this thesis instead focuses on the part of the reintegration that involved psycho-social aspects because they are relevant to the former fighters. Problems such as unemployment, low education and poor working skills are universal in the Liberian population and apply not only to former fighters. The approach in this thesis was to focus on identity so as to achieve unambiguous results.

5.3.6 Final conclusion: from youth to neglected veterans through the transformation of the web of connections

Liberia has clearly faced many changes due to a number of significant events that occurred in its history. These changes affected the relationships between citizens in general and between different categories. Among the various categories, I decided to follow the progress of the one that faced marginalisation in the most recent period of Liberian history. Many scholars agree that after an initial period when ethnicity was the main reason for the marginalisation of some Liberians, the state of marginality passed to the country's youth.

In setting out the theoretical framework of this thesis in Chapter 2 I pointed out how I embraced these theories on the marginalisation of youth. Their exclusion from political, economic and social participation inevitably pushed youngsters to join factions during the conflict. Neither accepting nor rejecting the theories on uprooted youth, the evidence I collected during my fieldwork showed that many of these youth came from a normal background. When they joined the conflict they left their status and identity of marginalised youth behind to become fighters.

This research decided to track the changes in the particular category of fighters about their status, networks and identity – in other words, their web of connections. These changes affected the roles of fighters in society transforming their behaviour, beliefs and social position. This whole process is recognisable in every Liberian soldier as part of his natural evolution. While the concept of evolution embraces the individual from the beginning to the end of life, this thesis takes into consideration only those elements of transformation that occurred after the end of the war. This event represented the turning point between the past and the future in Liberian society.

In order to analyse the development of the events around the fighters, I had to consider the reintegration process. While most works dealing with the reintegration process in Liberia take for granted the existence of this group, this thesis has analysed closely those factors that contribute to their characterisation. This investigation of the transformation of the web of connections has been achieved through listening to what they had to say on this topic and accurately reporting their words. They state loud and clear that social marginalisation, discrimination and rejection represent the main threat to their category.

To measure the intensity of the recognition of the former fighters with this category I have been using identity as the main factor. Identity assesses to what extent the status of ex-combatants and their networks bond the individual with the category. Once the war started, the youth abandoned their previous identities to gain the identity of their warring faction. This shift occurred mainly because of the development of a strong sense of belonging to the factions. Their sense of belonging to a social category made them more identifiable with the group identity (Hogg and Abrams 1988) or with the collective identity of the former fighters.

The notion of collective identity in my work refers to the former fighters' sense of belonging to a group. If we take, for example, Tajfel and Turner (1982), we find that people associate themselves with various groups based on race, gender, ethnicity, occupation, religious beliefs and so on; by associating themselves with a social category, they assume its identity. This is the case of the former fighters who associate themselves in a "war family" and sometimes in new networks created after the end of the conflict. This act of gathering collectively is central to the identity construction process of the ex-combatants as a category. If we consider the two questions to define the "self" – "Who am I?" and "Who are we?" (Mead 1934) – this thesis analyses the alternation of these questions to define the personal identity. It is crucial for this work to analyse how the individual self in certain cases overrides the collective self, and vice versa.

The act of getting together created war networks during the fighting and new networks after the end of the conflict that pursued cooperative aims and established informal boundaries separating their members from their environments and alienating them from the community. This behaviour is a natural effect of the formation of a collective identity. Depending on the level of acceptance and approval from the community, the self-categorisation can lead to two different paths: the effective homogenisation of the identity with the community, or identification with the group of "neglected veterans". The SIT relates this idea to the fact that simply associating individuals in groups can result in in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination (Tajfel 1970).

The category of "neglected veterans" is based on the mental and emotional perceptions of the former fighters themselves. My work is focused on how the former fighters see themselves and on their perception of their situation. Both these points of view are the direct consequence of, and at the same time create consequences for, the

notion of identity. The use of SIT to analyse the former fighters' identity separated this work from the psychological field. When dealing with sensation, emotions and "self", it is easy to shift from the sociological to a psychological approach. This work focuses on how sensations and emotions affect the societal aspects of the reintegration of the former fighters.

Liberian history already shows how exclusion can lead to instability and conflict. The notion of identity exclusion represents one of the main reasons for the conflict in Liberia. Marginalised groups that were denied social, economic and political access chose violence to solve the problem. Since exclusion exemplifies the causes triggering conflict, it is essential to address it during peacetime.

The challenge of the reintegration process is to provide inclusive solutions for the categories that were excluded before the war and that then went through an identity transformation during it. The war did not solve the problem of exclusion, but postponed inclusion. Even if it was less intense during the period of 14 years of civil war, the feeling of exclusion was preserved in many of the individuals who joined due to marginalisation. The strong sense of belonging to certain groups, for ethnic, religious or age reasons was for many of them the meaning of their existence, but also the reason for them suffering discrimination. The process of identity evolution of the former fighters, which begins with the identity transformation after the war, defines their personal identity and occurs through their self-identification with the group. Individual identity does not disappear, but it is constructed through association with the group's activities, meanings and symbols, and arose after disaffiliation with other groups (Veale 2003: 106). Consequently, individual exclusion often results in the group marginalisation of the "neglected veterans". The group identity of "neglected veteran" as an excluded category is frequently the result of many psycho-social dynamics. A resilient sense of belonging, detachment from family and community, marginalised primary identities, and war-connected networks are all factors influencing this exclusion. This new group does not have boundaries in terms of numbers and geographical placement but they have the common characteristic of feeling excluded. This common characteristic can be dealt with in different ways and create different personalities. I met carpenters, wheel-barrowers, mechanics, farmers and thieves with such different life stories that they appeared to have nothing in common – but unconsciously they shared some threads that linked them together. They may be accepted or rejected by their communities; they may be economically

inserted in or excluded from the market, but they feel like neglected veterans and they all share this new identity. This new virtual group and its identity is the key to understanding the success or failure of the reintegration process in Liberia, and possibly also in other countries.

5.4 Recommendations

Following the conclusion of this study, it is possible to make a number of recommendations for further research. The analysis of the evolution of marginalisation in Liberia, assessing the impact on youth who turned to violence and became soldiers, which in turn led to the creation of a group of perceived neglected veterans in the country, has been successful at underlining the key psycho-social factors involved. The study has introduced a new manner of assessing this impact, using qualitative interviews to gain the first-hand perceptions of former soldiers. Further research could include the analysis of the possibility of marginalisation for other former-soldiers in surrounding countries. The number of recent conflicts in African nations highlights that it could be worthwhile assessing former soldiers from other regions to see if the concept of marginalisation also exists in the same shape as it does in Liberia. As well as this, it should be recommended that the same soldiers interviewed in this study should be interviewed after a certain period of time has passed (perhaps 5 years) to see whether the notion of marginalisation has reduced over time or if the psycho-social factors are still present in Liberian society through their perceptions. This would allow a longitudinal study to assess the impact of marginalisation and how it can change over time.

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